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1. Literature - Hist. and crit.

14

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ANECDOTES

OF

POLITE LITERATURE.

SECT. I.

I SHALL not begin this eſſay with a tedious enquiry into every particular article of grammar that forms what we call compoſition. A dry diſſertation on the proper arrangement of nouns, verbs, and articles, is not here intended; the reader's amuſement and inſtruction being equally my aim. If this ſketch will enable him to form a general, but competent idea of the ſubject, the pains which

I have taken in compoſing it will be ſufficiently anſwered.

A juſt taſte for the beauties of compoſition can only be formed by the frequent and attentive peruſal of ſuch books, as have been wrote on important ſubjects with correctneſs and elegancy. The harmony of graceful periods delights the ear, and conveys noble ſentiments with a powerful charm; but to afford ſo exquiſite an entertainment, great art and care is requiſite. To reject common or low expreſſions, and trite phraſes, to chooſe accurately ſuch words as are both ſimple and pure, grand and expreſſive, and to adorn them with a compoſition, in the ſtructure of which, both ſweetneſs and dignity ſhall appear, — has been juſtly reckoned a great effort of genius.

Com-

Compoſition conſiſts in the beautiful and harmonious ſtructure of the periods in a diſcourſe, which adds an unſpeakable dignity and grace to a work, whether in poetry or proſe. But it is too often uſed to ſet off trite or mean thoughts; for a book may be very well wrote, and deficient in the thoughts. The ſtyle alone of ſome writers diſplays great genius, ſuch as Homer and Virgil, Cicero and Livy; and we oftener meet with mediocrity of ſtyle than moderate invention. As ſome writers compoſe well, and think ill; ſo others think well, but cannot expreſs themſelves elegantly. I ſhall not heſitate a moment to prefer the book that is thought, to that which is wrote, well. Some ſucceed in the choice of elegant and expreſſive words, but they loſe all their beauty by not being conſtructed with harmony.

Others are excellent in the ſtructure of a period, but ſpoil all by the uſe of low and ſordid words. But every quality is joined in a perfect work; the fineſt ſentiments cloath'd with the ornament of beautiful language; the invention of the pureſt and moſt elegant expreſſions expanded into an harmonious compoſition.

There is ſomething ſo extremely pleaſing in the harmony of modulated periods, that we are at firſt reading prejudiced in favour of a book in which we find it. But how often do thoſe writers who want invention, have recourſe to the beauties of compoſition, to hide their poverty of thought? I have already obſerved, that the matter is by far the moſt important part; and the graces of compoſition, in an inferior degree, are mechanic beauties, which a man may

gain

gain by trouble and practice; but to invent, is purely the effect of genius. An elegant ſtyle pleaſes, and by that means prevents us from reflecting with attention on the thoughts; but when we conſider them at a ſecond reading, when we are not warmed by the expreſſion, we then ſee their excellencies and defects; we often ſee the pooreſt and moſt trite, dreſſed up in the moſt harmonious language.

It is not only by the help of a new ſtyle that writers think to deceive the world; they attempt it alſo by ſetting an old thought in a new light, varying ſome circumſtances of it, and applying it in a manner different from what it was before. Some men gain a reputation by this practice; but we never reckon them among the fine original geniuſes.

Although a work be extremely well thought, yet unleſs it is alſo well wrote, it will pleaſe only *the few*. There are many more who can judge of words than of things, and who will throw aſide a book, if they don't find an elegance of ſtyle. This ſhows the neceſſity of cloathing fine ſentiments in a proper dreſs; that thoſe who are moſt likely to want inſtruction may be tempted to *think*, by being *pleaſed*. Would the orations of Demoſthenes have had ſo aſtoniſhing an event, if the thoughts only had been excellent? No; it was the wonderful enthuſiaſm of his ſtyle that gave effect to his ſentiments.

No nation ever excelled more in all the graces of compoſition, than the Greeks. We ſee in all their celebrated writers, whether poets, orators, or hiſtorians, &c. how intent they were in modelling their periods,

periods, and refining their language. The Grecian orator often leaves out expreſſions to be ſupplied by the imagination of his readers; and Cicero is ſo exact in giving an harmony to his writings, that he adds ſometimes more words than the ſenſe requires; this redundancy pleaſes the reader, as it gives much grace without weakening the ſentiment.

But whatever commendations I have given the graces of ſtyle, yet it muſt be allowed that the greateſt geniuſes have not always the fineſt manner of expreſſing themſelves. They are ſenſible of the ſuperiority of thoughts to ſtyle, and their ideas flow in too rapid a ſtream, to permit them to take ſo much care of the ornaments of their work, as of the ſubſtance. A leſs extenſive genius is not hurried away by the fire of his imagination; and, to make up for what he wants in the en-

thuſiaſm of poetry, he labours his ſtyle, to make every part of his piece at leaſt elegant. We have a ſtriking inſtance of this in Homer and Virgil. Homer's vaſt imagination pour'd forth beauties by thouſands; but the rapidity of his invention made him overlook ſome blemiſhes in point of elegance of ſtyle. Virgil's genius was far leſs daring than the Grecian's; and as he could not riſe to his ſublimity, he avoided the faults of his maſter, and gave his compoſition a neatneſs, and correctneſs, which is not to be found in Homer.

A work that does not ſurpriſe us by its ſublimity of ſentiment, ſhould pleaſe us by the beauties of its ſtyle. When the higher excellencies are wanting, we require more of the inferior ones. In Pope we meet with little ſublimity, and not

many

many of thoſe ſtrokes that ſpeak a great genius; but his ſtyle is every where elegant, his verſification muſical to the higheſt degree our language will admit. We even like his paſtorals for the beauties of compoſition, although they contain but few original ideas.—But it is in genius only that we muſt look for ſtriking beauties.

Genius deſerves here to be particularly conſidered; 'tis indeed impoſſible to write on the beauties of compoſition with any propriety, and not enlarge on its original ſource. There certainly may be many beauties in a poem, unattended with any marks of genius; but thoſe beauties will be but ſecondary ones. They may pleaſe, but will not captivate.

Non ſatis eſt pulchra eſſe poemata; dulcia ſunto,
Et quocunque volent, animum auditoris agunto.
Horat. de Arte Poetica, ver. 100.

We

We ſhould always preſerve the diſtinction between the elegancies of a work, and thoſe general and particular beauties, which are evidently the reſult of genius in the author. An heroic poem, or a tragedy, may be wrote with the moſt exact obſervance of the eſtabliſhed rules of criticiſm; the verſification may be harmonious, and the language chaſte; but if the poetic fire, the *vivida vis animi*, or, as Longinus * calls it, the rapid force of lightning, be wanting, the pleaſure we receive in reading it will be but cool and languid. We ſhall not be hurried on by the force of the poet's genius; our attention will not be commanded; we may be pleaſed with the elegance of his poem, but not tranſported with its ſublimity.

* Υψος δε που καιριως εξενεχθὲν τα τε πραγματα δικην σκηπτου παντα διεφορησεν, καὶ την τȣ ῥήτορος ευθύς αθρόαν ενεδειξατο δυναμιν. Longinus, § i.

Mr.

Mr. Pope, in his excellent preface to Homer's Iliad, juſtly obſerves, that "it is "the invention, that in different degrees "diſtinguiſhes all great geniuſes. The "utmoſt ſtretch of human ſtudy, learn-"ing, and induſtry, which maſter every "thing beſides, can never attain to this." If we examine the principal profeſſions to which mankind in general devote their time, we ſhall diſcern with great eaſe the vaſt effect of genius. 'Tis not only conſpicuous in poetry, but its ſiſter arts, painting and muſic, equally diſplay it. No man ever became a great general, ſtateſman, phyſician, nor even excelled in gaming (according to the Abbé Du Bos*) without a genius. Can we imagine that the famous Torſtenſon, or the great Condé, who became generals at their firſt

* Reflexions Critiques, &c. Vol. II. p. 7.

appearance

appearance at the head of an army, and displayed those abilities at five and twenty, which the experience of fifty years seldom bestows, were not born with a genius for commanding? or, in other words, with a vast invention, which is as essentially necessary to form a great general as a great poet? Some men, without a genius, have, by mere dint of labour, attained to the art of making verses, but never became poets. Many officers have performed their duty excellently well on a parade, and fought at the head of their regiments with conduct and courage, but yet never made a figure at the head of an army. Genius was wanting, whose place neither zeal, courage, caution, nor activity, can supply. That presence of mind, and perfect possession of himself in the midst of the hurry and confusion of a battle, which the Romans themselves so much admired

mired in Hannibal, and we in the Duke of Marlborough; that ſound judgment, and lively imagination, which enables one in a moment to penetrate the deſigns of the enemy, and remove every obſtacle by foreſeeing it, was never acquired by art.

There never was a man born without poſſeſſing a talent for ſomething. Genius does not diſcover itſelf only in poets, generals, or ſtateſmen; profeſſions much inferior, although they don't require a genius to carry them on, yet are ſufficient to diſcover one. I have already ſaid, that invention is its great mark. The invention of a man, born with a genius, which, if cultivated, would have made him a great general, but buried by his fate in ſome low mechanical trade, may be obſcured, but not extinguiſhed. It

will

will faintly diſcloſe itſelf; and in any critical caſe, which occurs in his buſineſs, where abilities are neceſſary to ſupport or extricate him, his invention will ſuggeſt reſources, that would never have been thought of by a perſon of no genius.

Talents indeed are ſometimes ſo peculiarly adapted to particular profeſſions, that thoſe who poſſeſs them will never make the leaſt figure out of the road for which nature deſigned them; but then if the bent of their genius is very ſtrong, it will on a thouſand occaſions diſcover itſelf. In this caſe, the poet, painter, or muſician, have great advantages; a genius for either of theſe profeſſions is much eaſier diſcloſed, than that which deſigns a youth for a general, or a ſtateſman. One boy will find chalk to ſketch fi-

gures on a board, another will be able to procure ſome miſerable flute or fiddle, and at leaſt diſcover his inclinations; while a poetic genius ſhall delight in making doggerel rhymes in converſation. I have here ſuppoſed, that the minds, in which theſe ſeeds of genius are ſown by nature, never reap the advantage of enjoying the education of a ſchool; but if we place them, amongſt many others, under the direction of an able maſter, the difference which I am here ſpeaking of, will appear ſtill more evident. The poets, painters, and muſicians, &c. will here have an open field to diſplay the bent of their genius, and very poſſibly will meet with the greateſt encouragement; while a boy, born with a mind adapted for a great ſtateſman or commander, ſhall have little or no opportunity of diſplaying his abilities, compared

red with thoſe which attend the other profeſſions. He may indeed diſcover a particular ſatisfaction in reading Cæſar or Quintus Curtius, and may converſe on military affairs with unuſual ardor; but theſe marks are not ſo ſelf-exiſting as thoſe diſplayed by the oppoſite ſpecies of genius.—On ſome occaſions indeed the fire of genius will blaze forth, in ſpite of all the reſtraints which are laid upon it by ignorance or accident. Hiſtory gives us innumerable inſtances of this: the Abbé Du Bos produces ſeveral. As the paſſage is curious and entertaining, the reader will excuſe my quoting it. "The moſt eminent painters were not born in the ſhops or work-houſes of their profeſſions: there are very few painters ſons who, purſuant to the common cuſtom of other arts, have been bred up in their father's profeſſion. Among the illuſtri-

ous

nus artiſts, who reflect ſo great an honour on the two laſt centuries; Raphael was the only one, ſo far as I can remember, that was ſon to a painter. Giorgione's and Titian's parents, as well as thoſe of Leonardi da Vinſci, and Paul Veroneſe, never handled pencil or chiſſel. Michael Angelo's father, according to common fame, was of a very good extraction, and lived without practiſing any lucrative profeſſion. Andrea del Sarto was a taylor's ſon, and le Tintoret the ſon of a dyer. The father of the Carraches did not profeſs handling a pencil. Michael Angelo di Caravaggio was a maſon's ſon, and Correggio's father a plowman. Guido was the ſon of a muſician; Dominichino of a ſhoe-maker, and Albano of a mercer. Lanfranco was a foundling, who learned to paint of his own genius, almoſt in the ſame manner

as Paſchal learned the mathematics. Rubens's father had neither ſhop nor work-houſe, but was one of the magiſtrates of Antwerp. The father of Vandyke was neither painter nor ſculptor. Freſnoy, who has favoured us with a poem on the art of painting, which has merited a tranſlation, and notes from Monſieur de Piles, and has left us alſo ſeveral good pictures, was bred a phyſician. The fathers of the four beſt french painters of the laſt century, Valentine, le Sieur Pouſſin, and le Brun, were not painters, the genius of theſe great men went, as it were, in ſearch of them to their parents houſes, to conduct them thence to Parnaſſus: for painters aſcend Parnaſſus as well as poets. Ovid's father was not ſatisfied with bare remonſtrances, in order to extinguiſh the poetic fire of his ſon; but ſuch was the force of genius

that

that our little Ovid is ſaid to have promiſed in verſe, to leave off making verſes, when he was whipped for this paſſion. Horace's firſt profeſſion was that of bearing arms: Virgil was a ſort of a jockey; at leaſt, we read in his life that he made himſelf known to Auguſtus by his ſecrets for the curing of horſes, for which this great poet was introduced into the emperor's ſtables. The moſt eminent french poets, who honoured the reign of Lewis XIV. were by birth and education remote from the profeſſion of poetry. Moliere's father brought his ſon up an upholſterer; and Peter Corneille wore a counſellor's gown, when he wrote his firſt pieces. Quinault was clerk to a lawyer, when he gave himſelf up to his inclination for poetry; for his firſt comic eſſays were wrote on papers half daubed over with

lawyers ſcrollings. Racine wore an eccleſiaſtical habit when he compoſed his three firſt tragedies. La Fontaine's employment among the waters and foreſts, ought to have deſtined him for the planting and cutting of trees, and not for making them ſpeak. If Monſieur L'Huillier, Chapelle's father, could have directed the occupations of his ſon, he would have applied him to any thing rather than poetry. Nanteuil's parents uſed the ſame endeavours to hinder him from being an engraver, as the generality of parents employ to engage their children to a particular profeſſion. He was obliged ſometimes to climb up into a tree, and conceal himſelf there, in order to exerciſe himſelf in drawing. Le Fevre, born an algebraiſt and great aſtronomer, began to exerciſe his genius, when he followed a weaver's trade at Liſieux.

Liſieux. The very threads of his loom contributed to improve him in the knowledge of numbers. Roberval, while tending his ſheep, could not eſcape the influence of his ſtar, which had deſtined him to be a great geometrician. He was learning geometry before he knew there was any ſuch ſcience. He was occupied with drawing lines and figures on the ground with his crook, when a perſon chanced to paſs by, who, taking notice of the child's amuſement, undertook to procure him an education more ſuitable to his talents, than that he received from the peaſant he lived with. The adventure which happened to Monſieur Paſchal, has been publiſhed by ſo many different hands, that it is known all over Europe. The parents of Monſieur Tournefort tried every method imaginable to divert him from purſuing

the ſtudy of botany. He was obliged, when he had a mind to go a ſimpling, to conceal himſelf, as other children hide themſelves, to loſe their time, at play."

A few remarkable inſtances may be added to theſe of the Abbe du Bos's; and none more ſo than that of the celebrated Handel, who, from his very childhood, had diſcovered ſuch a ſtrong propenſity to muſic, that his father, who always intended him for the ſtudy of the civil law, had reaſon to be alarmed. Perceiving that this inclination ſtill increaſed, he took every method to oppoſe it. He ſtrictly forbade him to meddle with any muſical inſtrument; nothing of that kind was ſuffered to remain in the houſe, nor was he ever permitted to go to any other, where ſuch kind of furniture

niture was in uſe. All this caution and art, inſtead of reſtraining, did but augment his paſſion. He had found means to get a little clavichord privately conveyed to a room at the top of the houſe: into this room he conſtantly ſtole when the family was aſleep. Theſe were the firſt dawnings of that genius, which afterwards broke out with ſo bright a ſplendor *. The paſſion which the Marſhal Turenne had for war, from his very infancy, is well known: his father thought, from the tenderneſs of his conſtitution, that he never would be able to bear the fatigues of war. To convince him of the contrary, the Viſcount took a reſolution, when he was but ten years old, of paſſing a winter's night on the ramparts of Sedan. His governor having ſpent ſome time in queſt of him, found

* Memoirs of Handel, p. 5.

him aſleep on the carriage of a cannon *. Among poets, there are many more inſtances beſides thoſe quoted by du Bos: Pindar was the ſon of a piper; Sophocles, of a mechanic; Plautus's father was a ſlave; Æſchines, the Socratic philoſopher, was the ſon of a ſauſage-maker; the father of Cowley was a grocer; Shakeſpear was the ſon of a dealer in wool; and Prior, of a joiner. 'Tis well known, that Rembrant's father was a miller; and Salvator Roſa, the ſon of a carpenter. The celebrated Columbus's father was a wool-ſpinner; Netſcher's an engineer. Marſhal Catinat began the world in the profeſſion of a lawyer; and Inigo Jones's father was a cloth-worker.

* Ramſay's life of Turenne, vol. 1. p. 3.

Theſe

Theſe inſtances, to which a thouſand others might be added, will be ſufficient to convince us, that genius oftentimes diſcovers itſelf in ſpight of all obſtacles; eſpecially that ſpecies of it, which determines men to be painters or poets: but thoſe talents which are neceſſary to form a great general or ſtateſman, have ſeldom the ſame opportunities for exerting themſelves. Every one's experience will tell how ſeldom parents encourage a military genius in their children, unleſs birth, or ſome other cauſe, gives them an intereſt to puſh a youth in the army. The moſt fatal cramp to genius, is, parents determining on profeſſions for their children, without conſulting their inclinations. If a man has a relation, who fills a place of conſequence in the law or the church, or who carries on an extenſive trade in the pro-

profeſſion of a merchant, his firſt determination is to breed his ſon to one of thoſe profeſſions; the natural genius of the youth is ſeldom or never conſidered. If that leads him to poetry or painting, ſuch a bias will break out in contempt of every ſhackle; but if he is born with a genius which deſtines him to ſhine at the head of armies, 'tis almoſt entirely in the power of a parent to prevent his being able to gratify his inclinations; at leaſt till the precious time is gone, in which experience ſhould cultivate the ſeeds of nature. Thus the proſpect of a better intereſt in a different profeſſion, the prudent circumſpection of a father, or the unambitious fondneſs of a mother, ſhall bury the fineſt genius, by directing its occupation into an unnatural channel.

It is generally the fate of men of great talents, to make a very ſlow progreſs in profeſſions for which nature did not deſign them. Formed to make a conſpicuous figure in one particular art or ſcience, they find nothing in any other that can engage their attention. Thus a genius which deſtined a man for a great mathematician, will never enable him to excel at the bar, or in the pulpit: nor will thoſe talents which naturally adapt a man to the profeſſion of the law, ever diſtinguiſh him in the ſtudy of the mathematics. Claude Lorrain, the celebrated landſcape painter, proving extremely dull and heavy, was ſoon taken from ſchool, and bound an apprentice to a paſtry-cook, with whom he ſerved his time out; and the immortal Sir Iſaac Newton was refuſed his degree at the univerſity, as a heavy young man, totally devoid

void of genius. Can we ſuppoſe that a man born with a genius to command armies, or govern an empire, can exert his abilities, when they are confined to the compaſs of a compting-houſe? Will he not rather deſpiſe all the grovelling dirty littleneſs of trade? and while all his competitors outſtrip his progreſs, his imagination ſhall be on the wing, and ſoar into far other regions than thoſe of commerce?

Ut ſæpe ſumma ingenia in occulto latent!
Hic qualis imperator nunc privatus eſt *.

Genius does not ſo much conſiſt of an exemption from faults, as of the production of great and ſtriking beauties †.

* Plaut. Capt. act. 1. ſcen. 2.

† Si un ouvrage ſans défaut etoit poſſible, il ne le ſeroit qu'à un homme médiocre.

Eſſais ſur divers ſujets de literature, &c. tome iii. p. 107.

Shake-

Shakeſpear was a poet of a moſt unbounded imagination, but the faults in his works are innumerable. There cannot be a more abſurd notion than to judge of a poet's genius by the number of his beauties, inſtead of their value. I could produce many ſpeeches in Shakeſpear, that evidently ſpeak their author a great genius, when they do not contain above half a dozen lines; and yet one of theſe ſtrokes ſhall be preferable to a whole tragedy of this age, which abounds in the elegancies of ſtile and harmony of verſification. I had rather have been author of the converſation between Macbeth and his wife, when he came from the murder, and which does not conſiſt of twenty words, than of the whole tragedy of Jane Shore, which is the beſt Rowe wrote. I had rather have been author of the deſcription of Hector parting from Andro-

Andromache, of the Ægis of Pallas, or the extent of Diſcord, all in the Iliad, than the whole five epic poems of Sir Richard Blackmore *.

The

* La perfection ne conſiſte pas ſeulement à éviter les défauts, mais encore à porter les beautés du-moins juſqu'au plus haut degré connu. Elle conſiſte principalement dans le nombre & dans le prix de ces beautés. Il y a donc bien de la différence entre un ouvrage ſans un défaut, & un ouvrage parfait. L'ouvrage le plus parfait, ou, pour mieux dire, le moins imparfait, eſt celui dans lequel il y a moins de défauts, & de grands défauts; ſurtout plus de beautés, & de plus grands beautés. ——Si l'auteur eſt un génie du premier ordre, il aura paſſé les plus haut degré connu. Un pareil genie ſurpaſſe toujours, à quelques égards, tous ceux qui l'ont précédés. Il eſt toujours le premier, ſi non dans quelque genre d'ouvrage, du moins dans quelque genre de beautés. — Les lecteurs ordinaires preferent les ouvrages d'une beauté continuë quoique médiocres, à ceux d'une plus grande beauté, mais moins ſoutenuë, ſurtout ſi elle

The abſolute neceſſity of genius to form a poet, is too evident to be diſputed: did ever any verſifier without it enjoy a great and laſting reputation? Moſt men, on ſome occaſion or other, have made verſes; a taſk not ſo difficult as ſome have imagined: but how few have been the authors of works worthy to be remembered? A man of indifferent talents may even arrive at the art of compoſing in an harmonious verſification; his numbers may be poliſhed, eaſy,

elle eſt interrompuë par des défauts conſidérables. Les gens du métier, plus faits à la peine & a là fatigue; & les gens dé goût, plus ſenſibles au grand beau, liſent volontiers tout un livre pour un petit nombre de traits d'un certain prix. Ils péſent les beautés plus qu'ils ne les comptent.

Eſſais ſur divers ſujets au Literature & de Morale, par Monſ. L'Abbé Troublet. Tom. iii. p. 108.

and

and flowing; and he may cloathe the ideas of others in a new and elegant garb; ſtill we ſhall read the works of ſuch a poet with ſomewhat (to uſe an expreſſion of Dr. Young's *) of his languor, who liſtens to a twice told tale. We may poſſibly find ſome late writers of tragedy, who enjoyed every advantage, which 'tis ſuppoſed Shakeſpear wanted: yet, what is there in their works that will make amends for ſo great a want? Will any one dare to name Elfrida in compariſon with any of Shakeſpear's beſt tragedies? and yet that piece is wrote with a ſtrict obſervance of the dramatic rules, and by a very ingenious man. But genius is above criticiſm, whoſe ſtreams flow from the fountain of

* Conjectures on original compoſition, p. 12.

the

the works of genius *. Did Ariſtotle or Boſſu write their critical rules for compoſing an epic poem or a tragedy, before Homer wrote his Iliad, or Sophocles his Œdipus? If a more excellent poem than the Iliad was to appear in the world on quite a different plan, would not Ariſtotle and Boſſu's treatiſes on epic poetry ceaſe to be regarded as ſtandards of critical rules? I would only infer from hence, that genius is above all rules: Shakeſpear did not write to the underſtanding, but to the heart: It would poſſibly be for the advantage of litera-

* Les régles qui ſont un ſecours pour les eſprits médiocres, ſont quelquefois un obſtacle pour les génies ſupérieurs.

——— Un homme ordinaire fait un ouvrage conforme aux régles connues. Un grand homme en fait un qui donne lieu à de nouvelles régles.

Eſſais ſur divers ſujets de literature, &c. tom. iii. p. 113.

ture, if all criticiſm * was reduced to one ſimple rule of judging of works of genius, merely by one's feeling.—Give me one noble flight of an irregular genius,

* The philoſophical ſpirit, ſays the Abbé du Bos, which is nothing but reaſon ſtrengthened by experience, whereof the name alone would be new to the ancients, is of great ſervice in compoſing books, which inſtruct people to avoid miſtakes in writing, as alſo in detecting thoſe that have been committed by an author; but it miſguides us in judging of a poem in general. Thoſe beauties, in which its greateſt merit conſiſts, are better felt than found out by rule and compaſs. Quintilian did not make a mathematical calculation, or a metaphyſical deſcription of the real and relative faults of thoſe on whom he has paſſed a judgment, adopted by all ages and nations. 'Tis by that impreſſion they make on the reader, that this great man has defined them; and the public, which has conſtantly uſed the ſame method of judging, has always conformed to his opinion.

Réflexions Critiques, tom. ii. ſect. 34.

before

before all the unintereſting tragedies that ever were compoſed by an hundred ſuch writers as a Home. But I take up too much of the reader's time in dwelling on an argument, the principles of which will, I believe, be allowed by moſt men. The nature of my ſubject requires that I ſhould make a few obſervations on another material ſource of fine compoſition.—Voltaire rightly obſerves, that to be a competent judge of the praiſe due to the remains of men of genius, a critic ought to poſſeſs ſome ſparks of that poetic fire which warmed the author he criticiſes. A man, deſtitute of genius, might as well attempt to write an epic poem, as to criticiſe the works of genius, without taſte.

Mr. D'Alembert defines taſte to be, " Le talent de démêler dans les ou-
" vrages de l'art ce qui doit plaire aux

 " ames

" ames ſenſibles, & ce qui doit les " bleſſer *." There are ſome beauties in nature and art, which are ſo ſtriking as to make an impreſſion on the moſt phlegmatic minds. If a man reliſhes the poetry of Homer, or Milton, it does not therefore follow that he poſſeſſes a fine taſte. Taſte depends on the acuteneſs and ſenſibility of the perceptive powers of the mind: in ſome men theſe are of ſuch refined delicacy, as to enable them not only to *perceive*, but to *feel* the beauties of an author with the moſt enthuſiaſtic rapture; and to obſerve the moſt trifling and minute blemiſhes. The organs of others are ſo coarſe, that both their enjoyments and ſufferings are languid.

A fine taſte not only diſtinguiſhes between beauties and defects in the contemplation of an object, but takes a

* Réflexions ſur le Gout, p. 299.

diſtinct

diſtinct view, a quick and comprehenſive diſcernment of the various qualities, in their ſeveral relations and connexions, which enter into its compoſition. It not only diſcerns the general beauties and defects of an author, but diſcovers the mixture of ſtyles in the ſame production, the ſeveral ways of thinking, and the marks of imitation. But although this refinement of penetration muſt proceed from a ſenſibility of taſte, yet we are not to impute erroneous judgments only to a want of delicacy in the mind, or of ſenſibility in the organs of perception. The pleaſure we receive from any excellent production of art, is, or may be derived from different ſources. The true philoſophical analyſis conſiſts, therefore, in diſtinguiſhing well theſe various ſources, and keeping them ſeparate from each other, that ſo we may refer to each

what properly belongs to it, and may not attribute our pleaſures to cauſes that have had no ſort of influence in their production.

It has been obſerved, that the rules of each art ſhould be taken from the moſt excellent compoſitions, which each reſpective art has furniſhed, and the obſervation is undoubtedly juſt. It is not, however, by the confuſed aggregate of pleaſure, by the collective reſult of the agreeable perceptions, which theſe compoſitions have produced in us, that we are to fix the rules of taſte; but by that reflex act of the mind, which enables us to diſtinguiſh the particular paſſages, that excited in us delightful ſenſations, from thoſe which were only deſigned as ſhades in the piece, or as reſting places for the exhauſted attention of the reader,

reader, and alſo from thoſe, where the author has exhibited marks of involuntary negligence. For want of obſerving this method, the imagination, warmed by certain beauties of the nobleſt kind, which may ſhine forth in a work, otherwiſe full of the moſt monſtrous defects, will gradually become inſenſible of theſe defects; nay, will transform them into beauties, and conduct us at length to that ſtupid enthuſiaſm, which, by admiring every thing indiſcriminately, perceives, or rather feels, nothing truly. Thus, by a confuſed and mechanical impreſſion, many will be led either to eſtabliſh falſe rules of taſte, or what is equally pernicious, to ſubſtitute arbitrary notions, in the place of fixed principles, to contract the ſphere of the art; to preſcribe bounds to our pleaſures, in order to render them inſipidly uniform, and to confine, as Mr.

D'Alembert obſerves, the efforts of genius and induſtry within a narrow circle.

As the original principles of taſte are deeply rooted in human nature, ſo ſenſibility is alſo chiefly owing to the phyſical formation of the organs of perception: But the refinement of taſte depends in a great meaſure on external cauſes; indeed an original delicacy of imagination, and natural acuteneſs of judgment, are abſolutely neceſſary for its foundation *, but an intimate acquaintance with the beſt

* Monſ. Rouſſeau juſtly obſerves, Le goût eſt en quelque maniere le microſcope du jugement; c'eſt lui qui met les petits objets à ſa portée, & ſes opérations commencent ou s'arrêtent cèlles du dernier. Que faut il donc pour le cultiver? s'exercer à voir ainſi qu'à ſentir, & à juger du beau par inſpection comme du bon par ſentiment. *Julie, tom.* i. *p.* 73.

per-

performances in every art, muſt complete the ſtructure.* This is not to be acquired at firſt, it is a perfection which requires time, inſtruction, and experience. A young man uninſtructed in the arts of muſic and painting, let his natural ſenſibility be ever ſo quick and lively, will not immediately diſtinguiſh, in a grand concert of muſic, the various parts whoſe connexion and relation conſtitute the eſſence and charm of the compoſition, nor will he perceive in a picture the gradations of light and ſhade, that harmony of colours, that correctneſs of deſign which characteriſe a finiſhed piece; but in proceſs of time, and alſo by degrees, he learns to hear and to ſee in a more perfect manner. The ſame uninſtructed perſon will feel a variety of emotions ariſe

* Vide Gerard's Eſſay, p. 126.

in

in his mind, the firſt time he is preſent at the repreſentation of a fine tragedy; but he will neither perceive the dexterity of the author in maintaining the unities, nor that exquiſite art, by which the drama is ſo managed, that no perſon enters upon the ſcene, nor quits it without evident reaſon, nor yet that ſtill more nice and difficult art of making the various ſubordinate intereſts, terminate and center in one, which abſorbs them all. It is only by the force of habit and reflection, that he will diſtinguiſh theſe ſeveral objects of taſte, and feel delightful ſenſations from circumſtances, of which formerly he had little or no idea.†

Refine-

† See Voltaire's eſſay. There have been more definitions of taſte than of any faculty. Monſ. Seran de la Tour defines it, "Le gout dans tous les genres du beau, eſt un ſentiment paſſif, lorſqu'il en reçoit ou qu'il en concoit l'idée. Il eſt actif, lor-

Refinement of taſte, in which I include correctneſs, will give us that accurate diſcernment, which enables us to draw the exact line between thoſe objects that really are, and thoſe which only appear to be beautiful. This acute delicacy penetrates through every ſuperficial ſhining ornament, and diſcovers the latent excellencies of a performance. In the productions of great irregular geniuſes there will naturally be many doubtful paſſages *, which men of a coarſe

lorſqu'il exprime, ou qu'il peint cette idée avec la force, & la grace dont il eſt ſuſceptible. *L'Art de ſentir & de juger en matière de gout.*——And Mr. Webb ſays, Taſte is a facility in the mind to be moved by what is excellent in an art; it is a feeling of the truth. *Remarks on the Beauties of Painting*, p. 8.

* Genius loves to ruſh forward without controul, and without rule, to produce indiſcriminately the monſtrous and the ſublime, and to carry down

coarſe taſte will be unable to pronounce either beauties or defects; but a refined taſte removes every diſguiſe which art, or the impetuoſity of genius, occaſions, and diſtinguiſhes the exact dividing line with the moſt accurate preciſion.

down its rapid ſtreams, gold and mud mingled together by the impetuoſity of its courſe. Reaſon, therefore, gives to genius, while it creates a boundleſs liberty, and even permits it to continue its career, until it exhauſts its vigour, and ſinks down to repoſe, like thoſe fiery courſers, which it is impoſſible to tame, any other way than by throwing the bridle upon their necks. But then is the time for reaſon to exerciſe its authority, and to ſit in judgment upon the productions of genius. Accordingly, it preſerves whatever was the off-ſpring of a true and noble enthuſiaſm; effaces, on the contrary, whatever was produced by the irregular ſallies of an overheated imagination, and thus enriches the republic of letters with maſterly performances in all the various kinds.

D'Alembert Réflexions ſur le Goût.

The

The contemplation of an object, or the peruſal of a performance, neceſſarily produces ſentiments of approbation or diſlike: refinement of taſte does not only enable us to feel thoſe ſenſations, but to perceive the particular beauties and their reſpective qualities that occaſion them. By this aſſiſtance we trace every ſentiment to its original cauſe, diſentangle a complicated cluſter of beauties and defects, arrange them in a methodical manner, determine the character of each, and aſcertain its quality and degree; by this means, clearly perceiving the particular ſpecies of every excellence or fault that produces an effect on the imagination.

Although the principles of taſte are fixed in human nature, yet as its objects vary, thoſe principles will ſeem to vary. Thus many nations and ages have been uni-

univerſal in admiring authors who have met with the neglect they deſerved in more enlightened times. Lucilius ſunk into oblivion when Horace aroſe; Regnier was no longer admired in France * after Boileau appeared; and Cowley is long ago greatly ſunk in his reputation in

* A late author, who has wrote on the declenſion of taſte in France, ſince the time of Boileau, ſays, "Cependant le peu de ſolidité que nous avons vù à nos fortunes; les viciſſitudes qu'elles ont eſſuiées le beſoin que nous avons ou que nous craignons d'avoir un jour les uns des autres; ce monſtre enfin que toutes les puiſſances humaines ne ſçauroient abattre, le luxe qui eſt preſque pouſſé à ſon dernier période, nous raproche un peu, malgré nous, de ces malheureux tems. Amoureux tous, & amoureux à la fureur d'une certaine conſidération que eſt le fruit de l'intrigue & qui par malheur devient le canal des richeſſes, nous mettons, pour y arriver, notre imagination dans un eſclavage continuel; nous modérons ſes ſaillies; nous

in England, our later poets have quite eclipſed his reputation. But the taſte

nous éteignons à tous les momens ſon feu, & enfin la vérité, qui n'eſt jamais flateuſe, eſt forcée de mourir à chaque inſtant ſur nos levres qui ne s'ouvrent plus que pour de froids & d'officieux menſonges, que pour des complimens qui, quoique pleins de fadeur, ſont devenus reſpectables par la mode qui a eu le talent de les conſacrer. Telles ſont nos mœurs ; par elles jugez de notre ſtile, & ne vous étonnez plus de ces petites phraſes dont ſont farcis nos livres ; phraſes froides, etudiées and façonnées comme l'eſprit qui les a produites : accoutumez-vous à cette fauſſe delicateſſe qui fait aujourd'hui le prix de nos ouvrages a qui pourroit bien avoir pris ſa naiſſance dans nos converſations. Cependent qu'eſt-ce que ces converſations ? Des diſcours rompues où, pour plaire, il ne s'agit, avec un peu d'arrogance, que de ſcavoir placer quelque mot qui par une certaine obſcurité repondue à deſſein, & qu'on a beaucoup d'eſprit & la malice de ne le montrer par tout.

Reflexions ſur la Poeſie, par Mr. R. D. S. M. page 337.

of

of nations improves, as great geniuſes and excellent artiſts ariſe; as it is a comparative ſenſation, it can only teach us to value objects comparatively. If a more excellent epic poet than Milton appears among the Engliſh, the fine taſte will make us reliſh his poetry beyond the others, but at preſent we beſtow on him the higheſt admiration; this conduct is entirely conſiſtent with the principles of true taſte.

SECT. II.

Of Epic Poetry.

SO many noble heroic poems have enriched the republick of letters, that the rules of the Epopea are now perfectly known. Thoſe laid down by the antients, of whom Ariſtotle is the chief, were

were drawn from the books of Homer, following the cuſtom, or, as Voltaire ſays, the folly of thoſe men who commonly take the commencement of an art for the principles of the art itſelf. Succeeding critics have enlarged, and changed thoſe rules, as Virgil wrote an epic poem in which he blended both the plans of Homer. As the rules of the epopea were not invented before the writing any one poem of the kind, every ſucceeding heroic poet, the greatheſs of whoſe genius would reconcile us to any innovations he made in the eſtabliſhed rules, would be ſufficient to enlarge the circle of them. This was the caſe on the appearance of the Æneid. It alſo gave riſe to a multitude of trifling precepts of little conſequence to true criticiſm, ſuch as, that an epic poem ſhould not conſiſt of leſs than twelve books: that it ſhould

end fortunately: that in the firſt book there ſhould be no ſimile: that the exordium ſhould be very ſimple and unadorned. Whether the action, ſays Voltaire, of an epopea be ſimple or complex, compleated in a month or in a year, or a longer time; whether the ſcene be fixed to one ſpot, as in the Iliad; or that the hero voyages from ſea to ſea, as in the Odyſſey; whether he be furious like Achilles, or pious like Æneas; whether the action paſs on land or ſea; on the coaſt of Africa, as in the Luſiad of Camoens; in America, as in the Araucana of Alonzo D'Ercilla; in heaven, in hell, beyond the limits of our world, as in the Paradiſe Loſt; all theſe circumſtances are of no conſequence: the poem will be for ever an epic poem, at leaſt till another new title be found proportioned to its merit.

But

But in ſpite of this variety of criticiſms, there are ſome rules which it is univerſally agreed by men of genius are fundamental and indiſpenſable. Boſſu defines the epopea to be "a diſcourſe invented by art, to form the manners by ſuch inſtructions as are diſguiſed under the allegories of ſome one important action, which is related in verſe after a probable, diverting, and ſurpriſing manner *."

* L'epopeé eſt un diſcours inventé avec art, pour former les mœurs par des inſtructions déguiſées ſous les allégories d'une action importante, qui eſt racontée en vers d'une maniere vrai-ſemblable, divertiſſante, & merveilleuſe. *Traite du poeme epique, p.* 14.

This definition is in part founded on Ariſtotle. Ἡ μὲν οὖν ἐποποιϊκὴ τῇ τραγῳδίᾳ μέχρι μόνου μίτρου μετὰ λόγου μίμησις εἶναι σπουδαίων ἐκολούθησεν. Τῷ δὲ τὸ μέτρον ἁπλοῦν ἔχειν, καὶ ἀπαγγελίαν εἶναι, ταύτῃ διαφέρουσιν. ἔτιορα

The juſteſt diviſion of the epopea is into, 1. action: 2. moral: 3. poetry. The action ſhould be great, ſingle, intire, marvellous, but yet probable, and of a certain length *. The moral, or, as Ariſtotle calls it, the ſentiments, is all that makes the matter of the diſcourſe;

ἔτι δὲ τῷ μήκει· ἡ μὲν ὅτι μάλιστα τειρᾶται ὑπὸ μίαν περιοδον ἡλίου εἶναι, ἢ μικρὸν ἐξαλλάττειν. ἡ δὲ ἱστοριὸικὴ, ἀόριστος τῷ χρόνῳ, καὶ τούτῳ διαφέρει. καὶ τοι τὸ πρῶτον ὁμοίως ἐν ταῖς τραγωδίαις τοῦτό ἐποίουν, καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἔπεσι. μέρη δέ ἐστι τὰ μὲν ταυτὰ, τὰ δὲ ἴδια τῆς τραγωδίας. Ariſtot. de Poet. Glaſg. 1745, p. 12.

De Ramſay's definition is different; but it was calculated for his criticiſm on Telemachus. It is, ſays he, une fable racontée par un poëte pour exciter l'admiration, & inſpirer l'amour de la vertu, en nous repréſentant l'action d'un héros favoriſé du ciel, qui exécute un grand deſſein en triomphant de tous les obſtacles qui s'y oppoſent. *Diſcours de la poeſie epique, p. 3.*

* Ariſt. de poet. & diſc. de la poeſ. epiq.

and

and they conſiſt in moving, refining, exciting the paſſions; as pity, anger, fear, and all others, to enhance the value of, or debaſe any thing †. The language, Addiſon ſays, in one word, ſhould be both perſpicuous and ſublime ‡.

Homer's excellencies are too well known to be repeated here; and altho' Scaliger, Voltaire, and many more have endeavoured to diminiſh his reputation by their criticiſms, yet that fame which thrives untouched but by whimſical critics for ſo many ages, we may determine deſerves all honours that attend it. Voltaire diſplayed his abilities to criticiſe Homer, when he ſaid, "Thoſe who cannot read Homer in the original, may read the tranſlation of Mr. Pope, and

† Ariſt. de poet. c. 20.
‡ Spectator, Vol. 4. No. 285.

there perceive the fire of that father of poets, as it were reflected in a poliſhed and faithful mirrour; none of the beauties of Homer are loſt in that fine tranſlation, and the greateſt part of the faults are corrected or diminiſhed." Mr. Pope's tranſlation is perhaps the beſt of any author in any tongue; yet will any perſon who is a maſter of the Greek tongue, compare its beauties with thoſe of the original work, wrote in the moſt copious, and moſt noble language the world ever knew; and had his tranſlator's genius been equal, or ſuperior, what a vaſt difference would there have been between two fabricks, the one erected with the fineſt marble, the other built with brick and pebbles? * The reſemblance, to uſe

* Dr. Young, with more reaſon, ſaid Pope had put Achilles in petticoats.

the

the ſimile of Cervantes, muſt be like ſhowing the wrong ſide, for the right, of tapeſtry.

Many, ſays Voltaire, abandon Homer after the fourth or fifth book. Is it not thus, that he has ſo many admirers, and ſo few readers, and is ſo much adored and neglected?—Surely this queſtion almoſt anſwers itſelf: ſtrictly ſpeaking, Taſſo, or his own Henriade, may be more read than Homer; but does that ſhow their excellence? Is there as many people in the world who underſtand Greek, as there are who can read French or Italian? The cuſtom of moſt nations at preſent does not ſo much encourage the ſtudy of that language as the Latin, and conſequently it has not ſo many admirers: but what ſpeaks very fully

the great excellence of Homer is, that moſt men, eminent for their genius and learning, have agreed in paying an almoſt enthuſiaſtic veneration for his works: Boileau might well ſay,

On diroit que pour plaire, inſtruit par la Nature,
Homere ait à Venus dérobé ſa ceinture.
Son livre eſt d'agrémens un fertile tréſor.
Tout ce qu'il a touché ſe convertit en or.
Tout reçoit dans ſes mains une nouvelle grace:
Par tout il divertit, & jamais il ne laſſe.
Une heureuſe chaleur anime ſes diſcours,
Il ne s'égare point en de trop longs détours.
Sans garder dans ſes vers un ordre methodique,
Son ſujet de ſoi-meme s'arrange & s'explique:
Tout, ſans faire d'apprêts, s'y prépare aiſément.
Chaque vers, chaque mot, court à l'évenement.
Aimez donc ſes ecrits, mais d'une amour ſincere.
C'eſt avoir profité que de ſavoir s'y plaire *.

A tedious criticiſm on this well-known poet would now be abſurd; but I muſt

* Oeuvres de Boileau, Amſt. tom. i. p. 179.

quote

quote the ſentiments of another ingenious French writer, altho' they are in ſome reſpects liable to exceptions.——— On doit mettre une grande différence entre l'Homere & ces ouvrages. L'Iliade & l'Odyſſée ſont remplies de foibleſſes & de puérilitiés ; il faut être bien aveugle pour n'en pas convenir ; mais il faut y voir peu pour ne pas s'appercevoir que ſes défauts ſont les défauts du tems, les effets néceſſaires de l'enfance où Homere à trouvé la raiſon ; que dans tout ce qui étoit à la portée du génie de ſon âge ; il éclate de ſublimes beautés ; qu'il a aggrandi l'imagination de ces contemporains ; qu'il leur a montré des ideas nouvelles, & fait ſentir une harmonie inconnue ; qu'enfin c'eſt à lui que ſa patrie eſt redevable de la naiſſance de ce goût qu'elle a porté dans la ſuite ſi loin, & tranſmis à tous les autres peuples. Ce

poëte

poëte est en effet le patriarche de la littérature ; & cette idée qui naît de ses ouvrages, est démontrée par ce qu'on découvre dans le tems qu'ils furent connus. On voit alors l'esprit humain s'élever, le germe des sciences se développer, tous les arts tentés, & quelques uns perfectionnés. L'Iliade & l'Odyssée étoient des phénomenes pour ce siécle. La force des pensées, le charme des images, la douceur de l'harmonie, enchanterent tous les Grecs. On veut toujours imiter ce qu'on admire. Ceux qui se crurent assez de forces pour marcher sur les pas de ce grand homme les éprouverent. Quelques-uns le firent avec succès : on leur applaudit. Les éloges qu'on donne à un artiste qui réussit, sont un moyen infaillible de lui faire des rivaux. Il en naquit en foule ; & dans ce grand nombre il y en eut d'excellens. Un art qui réussit

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attire tous les autres, parce qui ceux qui ne ſe ſentent pas des diſpoſitions pour les cultiver, jaloux cependant de la gloire qu'on y acquiert, cherchent à en mériter une ſemblable en s'ouvrant des routes différentes.

Although the criticiſm is in general juſt, yet it is certainly a miſtake to ſay, that the poems of Homer are full of puerilities: this falſe judgment proceeds from not conſidering, that the change which manners and cuſtoms have ſuſtained, muſt neceſſarily make ſome actions of antiquity appear ſuch, which really were not *. It is certainly true, that

* Hiſtory ſets to view the revolutions in human affairs, wherein we behold real manners, virtues, and vices, with talents often in themſelves only middling and indifferent. Simple hiſtory is a narration, timid in the preſence of truth, a recital of facts

that we reverence Homer ſomewhat the more, on account of our knowing ſo little

facts expreſſed in the plaineſt manner, and which fears nothing ſo much as the pomp of words. The epopea, on the other hand, ſeizes the pencil of Homer, and at one view takes in the whole univerſe. A God diſcovers to the poet, in one inſtant, heaven, hell, and earth, the paſt, the preſent, and the future; who chuſes at will, and draws up an hiſtory of mankind, rather than of men. The ethic aſcends even to the myſteries of divine providence, and ſhews us at once the moving forces, their direction, and the effects they have produced. Here every thing ſhould be uttered with a degree of nobleneſs and dignity, ſuperior to its natural condition; men ſhould ſpeak in the ſtile of heroes, the paſſions ſhould all have an energy, a continued vigour; in ſhort, all ſhould be nature, but nature enchanted and tranſported by the enthuſiaſtic raptures of the muſe. There is not a ſingle verſe in the Æneid, which does not partake of the dignity of the muſe, invoked by the poet in the beginning of his work; and to this dignity

tle of the authors who preceded him. Fabricius, I think, gives us a long liſt of thoſe whoſe names are known; but the poetry of Homer is a ſufficient proof that there were poets of eminence before him; for no language can leap from its infancy at once to perfection, and the Greek ſhines with its brighteſt luſtre in his works *.

dignity they owe their poetic ſtrain; without this, they might be verſes indeed in another ſpecies of writing, but would be proſe in the epopeia.

Batteux's principles of Lit. vol. 1. p. 116.

* La Langue Grecque eſt, dit-on, à ſon plus haut point de perfection dans *Homere*. Si cela eſt, c'eſt une preuve déciſive qu'avant l'*Iliade* & l'*Odyſſée* il avoit déjà paru pluſieurs bons ouvrages en cette langue. Il eſt certain meme qu'il y a de bons ouvrages, avant qu'il y en ait de bien écrits. Enſuite il eſt naturel qu'il y en ait plus de bien écrits que de bons.

Eſſais ſur divers ſujets de Literature, &c. tom. iv. p. 162.

Virgil's

Virgil's reputation will be for ever immortal; his greateſt enemies cannot deny him a very rich vein of poetry, and a moſt perfect judgment; nor can his warmeſt admirers juſtly equal him to Homer, whoſe exuberant imagination poured forth original beauties, which Virgil was content to copy: invention is not the characteriſtic of the Latin poets: the ridiculous prejudice of Scaliger in favour of Virgil, and the neglect of Longinus, who never mentions him, forms perfect a contraſt.

Taſſo was yet in his infancy, when Triſſino, the author of the firſt tragedy in the vulgar language, undertook to write an epic poem. He choſe for his ſubject the deliverance of Italy from the Goths, by Belliſarius, under the emperor Juſtinian. The ſubject was great,

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and the execution, altho' very moderate, had great ſucceſs; that faint glimmering of light in the times of obſcurity, was not entirely effaced till the appearance of the ſhining brightneſs of Taſſo. Triſſino had great talents, and an extenſive capacity: he had been employed by Leo X. in many affairs of importance; and had been with great ſucceſs his ambaſſador to Charles V. But at laſt he ſacrificed his ambition, and all his other affairs, to his love for letters, which had then attracted his conſideration, as he found they were revived in Europe, and he had the glory of being their firſt fruits.

He was with reaſon charmed with the beauty of the books of Homer; and yet his greateſt fault is having imitated him; for imitation demands greater genius,

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and more art, than is commonly imagined. The flowers of the antient ſeem withered when plucked, and wove together by unſkilful hands: yet nothing is more common than to ſee authors mix pieces of Homer and Virgil in their own writings, hiding themſelves under thoſe great names, without conſidering, that the ſame things which are admirable in the antients, are ridiculous in their works *.

Triſſino endeavoured to imitate Homer, chiefly in his deſcriptions; but here he managed very injudiciouſly; for whilſt he took care to paint all that appeared domeſtic, and in the houſe of his heroes, not having omitted even a button, or a garter, in the deſcription of their habits,

* Vide Eſſay ſur le poem epique, par Voltaire, Dreſden edition, vol. i.

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he has ſaid not a word of their characters. I ſhould not, however, be particular in mentioning his faults, without at the ſame time obſerving, that he was the firſt modern in Europe, who attempted an epic poem in the vulgar language, and in verſe without rhyme *.

Camoens was the next epic writer. After Triſſino had employed himſelf in Italy, in clearing the way to the arts and ſciences, and in recovering them againſt all the obſtacles that the barbarity and ignorance of ſo many ages had covered them with, Camoens, in Portugal, began a new career, and acquired a reputation which he ſtill preſerves amongſt his countrymen; who reſpect his Luſiad, as much as we do the Paradiſe Loſt.

* Eſſai ſur le Poeme Epique.

Emanuel II. king of Portugal, wanting to diſcover, by the ocean, a new rout to the Eaſt-Indies, ſent, in 1497, Veraſco de Gama, with a fleet to execute that deſign, which being new, appeared raſh; but when ſucceſsful, acquired great glory to its author. Camoens followed Veraſco in this perilous voyage, for the friendſhip he bore him, and from a noble curioſity, common in the character of thoſe who are bleſſed with a fine imagination. He choſe this voyage for the ſubject of his poem, having the delicious pleaſure of celebrating his friend, and the actions he performed. He wrote part of it on the Atlantic ocean, and the reſt on the Indian ſhores. In a ſhipwreck he ſuffered on the coaſt of Malabar, he ſaved himſelf by ſwimming with

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one hand, and holding his poem in the other *.

A sub-

* Camoens was called the Virgil of Portugal; he was born of a good family at Lisbon, about the year 1529. He studied in the university of Coimbra, and gave proofs of his genius for poetry, while he was very young. However, not being born to fortunes, he was obliged to quit books, and have recourse to arms. He was sent to Ceuta in Africa, which the Portuguese were in possession of at that time, and acquitted himself like a good soldier, upon many occasions; but at last had the misfortune to lose one of his eyes, in defence of that town against the Moors. From thence he returned to Portugal, but did not yet find himself in a condition to live as he would; and, therefore, went next in the expedition to the East-Indies. In this absence he composed a great many poems, which gained him the good will and affection of the commanding officer, and some others, who had a tincture of polite literature; but happening unluckily to be severe upon one, who did not understand the privilege of poets, he was forced to

them, beſides eight volumes of obſervations, upon the miſcellaneous poems of Camoens, which this commentator left behind him in manuſcript.

Towards the end of the 16th century, Spain produced an epic poem, celebrated for ſome particular beauties, as well as for the ſingularity of the ſubject, and ſtill more remarkable for the character of the author.

Don Alonzo d'Ercilla y Cuniga, gentleman of the chamber to the emperor Maximilian, removed into the houſe of Philip II. and fought under his orders at the battle of St. Quintin, where the French were defeated *.

After that ſucceſs, Philip having eſtabliſhed his affairs, returned into Spain.

* Voltaire Eſſay ſur la Poeſie.

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The young Alonzo, by an inſatiable thirſt of true knowledge, and being deſirous to ſee the world, travelled into France, from thence into Italy and Germany, and ſtaid a long time in England. At length, when he was at London, underſtanding that ſome provinces of Peru and Chili had taken arms againſt the Spaniards, their conquerors and tyrants; the paſſion he had for glory, and the deſire of ſeeing ſome curious things, urged him, without heſitation, to viſit the new world. He arrived at Chili, at the head of ſome troops, which he maintained during the whole war.

On the frontiers of Chili, on the ſouthern coaſt, is a little mountainous country, named Araucana, inhabited by a race of men more robuſt, and more fierce, than all the other nations of America.

rica. They fought in defence of their liberty, with more courage, and for a longer time, than the other Americans, being the laſt that the Spaniards conquered. Alonzo carried on a long and bloody war with them, and in the end reduced them under the obedience of the king of Spain.

During the courſe of this war, he formed the deſign of immortalizing his enemies, and immortalized himſelf. He was, at the ſame time, the conqueror and the poet; he employed his intervals of leiſure from the war, in writing its events; and for want of paper, he wrote the firſt part of his poem on bits of leather, which he had the trouble afterwards to arrange. The poem was called Araucana, from the name of the country. It contains ſome ſtriking beauties, but

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in general it is below all other epic poems. One is aſtoniſhed at ſeeing him fall ſo low, after mounting ſo high. He has, without doubt, much fire in his battles; but no invention, no plan, no variety in his deſcriptions, nor unity of deſign. His poem is more ſavage than thoſe nations that are the ſubject of it. Towards the end of the work, the author is one of the firſt heroes of the poem. Notwithſtanding theſe defects, the great Cervantes ſaid, The Araucana might be compared to the beſt poems of Italy *.

Arioſto is the next epic poet, whoſe works deſerve to be remembered. M. de Voltaire rejects his pretenſions to that title; but a Frenchman is certainly not ſo competent a judge of the excellency of

* Eſſay ſur le Poeme Epique.

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an Italian poem, as the Italians themſelves. The academy of the Cruſca, after having examined the Orlando Furioſo of Arioſto, and the Gieruſalemme Liberata of Taſſo, made an authentic deciſion, which adjudges the firſt ſeat to Arioſto among the Italian epic poets. The moſt zealous advocate for Taſſo * acknowledges, he attacks the general opinion, and that the public has already given it in favour of Arioſto, ſeduced, as the Abbé du Bos obſerves, by the bewitching charms of his poetic ſtile. In this reſpect, it certainly ſurpaſſes the poetry of Taſſo's Jeruſalem, whoſe figures are frequently unſuitable to the paſſages to which he applies them; and have oftentimes more ſhew than truth: I mean, that they ſurprize and dazzle the

* Camillo Pellegrini, p. 11.

imagination,

imagination, but do not draw ſuch images as are proper to engage us. I ſhall mention, ſays the Frenchman I before quoted, nothing concerning the manners, characters, decency, and plan of Arioſto's poem. Homer was a geometrician, in compariſon to him, and every body knows the title which Cardinal d'Eſte gave to the ſhapeleſs aſſemblage of ill patched ſtories, which compoſe the Orlando Furioſo. The unity of action is ſo little obſerved, that they have been obliged, in the later editions, to point out, by a marginal note, placed near the paſſage where the poet interrupts his ſtory, the part of the poem where he recommences it, that the reader may follow the thread of the narration. This has been of great ſervice to the public; for Arioſto is ſeldom read twice in order; that is, paſſing from the firſt

canto

canto to the ſecond, and from the ſecond to the reſt, ſucceſſively; but by following, without any regard to the order of the books, the different ſtories which he has rather incorporated than united.

The very idea of celebrating the *madneſs* of an hero, carries with it ſomewhat extravagant and abſurd. Orlando doth not make his appearance till Book VIII. where he is placed in a ſituation not very heroic: he is firſt diſcovered to us in bed, deſiring to ſleep. His ultimate deſign is to find Angelica; but his purſuit of her is broken off in Book XXX. after which there are ſixteen more books to come, and in which Angelica diſappears. Other heroes are likewiſe engaged in the ſame purſuit. After reading the firſt ſtanza of Book I. one would

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be inclined to think, that the ſubject of the poem was the expedition of the Moors into France, under their emperor Agramante, to fight againſt Charlemagne; but this matter is the leaſt part of the poem. In fact, many of the knights perform exploits, equal, if not ſuperior, to thoſe of Orlando, and particularly Rogero, with a great atchievement of whom the poem is cloſed, viz. his killing Rodomont; but this event is not the completion of a ſtory, carried on principally through the whole work. The author paſſes from one incident to another, and from region to region (whether it be from England to the Heſperides, or from the earth to the moon) with ſuch incredible ſwiftneſs and rapidity, that one would think he was mounted upon his own winged ſteed Ippogrifo. He begins a tale of a knight

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in Europe, and ſuddenly breaks it off to reſume the unfiniſhed cataſtrophe of another in Aſia. The imagination of the reader is not ſo much involved in, as it is oppreſſed with, the multiplicities of ſtories, in the relation of each of which the poet is at the ſame time equally engaged *.

Arioſto, in ſpite of his political occupations, in which he was involved as long as he lived, and the care of a numerous family, which he was obliged to provide for, was able to finiſh his poem in thirteen years. It was ſcarcely multiplied by an edition, when the author had the agreeable ſurprize of hearing all Italy reſounding with the praiſes given to his performance. The learned beſtowed upon Arioſto the moſt enthu-

* Obſer. on Spen. p. 10.

ſiaſtical

ſiaſtical appellations; and the people ſhewed him the ſame teſtimonies of reverence, that the Grecians ſhewed three thouſand years before to their blind bard, by committing the Orlando to memory, and ſinging it through the ſtreets*. So numerous were the beauties found in the poem, that the pen of criticiſm dared

* Arioſto is ſaid to have been extremely vexed, if he heard his own writings repeated with an ill grace and accent. As he was paſſing one day by a potter's ſhop, it happened that the potter was ſinging a ſtanza out of the Orlando Furioſo, which he pronounced in ſo bad a manner, that Arioſto, being in an exceſſive paſſion, with a little ſtick he had in his hand, broke ſeveral of the pots which ſtood expoſed to ſale. The potter expoſtulated with him in very ſevere terms, for injuring a poor man, who had never done him the leaſt harm in his whole life: "Yes (replied Arioſto) I have not yet ſufficiently revenged myſelf upon you, for the injury which you have done me to my face."

Sir John Harrington's life of Arioſto, p. 420, 421.

not

not, at that time, to point out even ſome faults that might have been diſcovered in it; and the Florentines, who, proud of their Dante's, Petrarca's, and Boccaccio's, ſtooped with difficulty to acknowledge, that any body could write with Tuſcan purity, preſently granted that Arioſto's language was moſt elegant, and inferior to nobody's; nor did his reputation, like a ſudden flaſh of lightening, ſurprize, dazzle, and diſappear; but, ſun-like, it conſtantly ſhone with an equal luſtre, and is as bright in our days as it was two hundred years ago *.

It would take too much room to expatiate on each particular excellence, or defect of this poem; or to fix the degree of contempt the French critics

* Baretti's Italian Library, p. 51.

have

have generally deſerved, whenever they ſpoke of Arioſto. Thoſe wretched judges of epic poetry, ſays Sig. Baretti, have had the good luck of being conſtantly abſurd, whenever they ſpoke either in praiſe or blame of Meſſer Ludovico; and the pitiful deciſions they have uttered, whenever they have compared our Orlando to our Gieruſalemme, prove their perfect ignorance of our language, and epic poetry, as well as the impudence of their temper *.

Taſſo,

* Among many ſtriking inſtances of the people's veneration for Arioſto, he had one of a very particular nature. The duke, his maſter, had ſent him governor of the Garfagnana, a province on the Appenine, whoſe inhabitants, ſeizing the opportunity of the general turbulencies that over-ran Italy at that time, paid but little obedience to their ſovereign. Arioſto took his reſidence in a fortified caſtle, from which it was imprudent to ſtep

Taſſo, by his Gieruſalemme Liberata, immortalized himſelf. It is at this day ſung

out without guards, as the whole neighbourhood was ſwarming with out-laws, ſmugglers, and banditti, who, after committing the moſt enormous exceſſes all round, retired for ſhelter againſt juſtice amidſt thoſe rocks and cliffs. Arioſto, one morning, happening to take a walk without the caſtle in his night-gown, and in a fit of thought forgot himſelf ſo much, that, ſtep after ſtep, he found himſelf very far from his habitation, and ſurrounded on a ſudden by a troop of thoſe deſperadoes, who certainly would have ill-uſed, and, perhaps, murdered him, had not his face been known by one of the gang; who, informing his comrades, that this was Signor Arioſto, the chief of the banditti addreſſed him with intrepid gallantry, and told him, that ſince he was the author of the Orlando Furioſo, he might be ſure that none of the company would injure him, but would ſee him, on the contrary, ſafe back to the caſtle; and ſo they did, entertaining him all along the way with the

ſung in many parts of Italy, like the poem of Arioſto. If the poets, his ſucceſſors, are degenerated; if Italy is fallen into the *faux brillans*, into pitiful conceits, and miſerable points; we may, nevertheleſs, ſay, that the nation in general preſerves a ſpecies of the good taſte which Taſſo inſpired. Although he is admired by his Italian readers, he is not imitated by their writers. Thus in England, Milton and Shakeſpear attract always the public admiration, in ſpight of a ſect of writers come after them, who have introduced a new way of thinking

the various excellencies they had diſcovered in his poem, and beſtowing upon it the moſt rapturous praiſes. A very rare proof of the ineſtimable powers of poetry, and a noble comment on the fables of Orpheus and Amphion, who drew wild beaſts, and raiſed walls, with the inchanting ſound of their lyres!

and writing, cultivated conſtantly by themſelves; but as they want genius, it is rejected by the reſt of the nation.

The Gieruſalemme Liberata is in many places wrote after the Iliad. But I wonder at Monſ. de Voltaire's thinking, that Taſſo's ſubject is more noble than that of Homer, which it certainly is not. All Greece waging a fierce war with a mighty empire, for the poetic part, is much more noble than the Pope's raiſing an army of Chriſtians to recover Jeruſalem. And it muſt be confeſſed, that nothing can be rendered greater than Homer has his fable.

In regard to the execution of ſo great a work, Taſſo is far beneath him; from whoſe works many of his beauties are imitated.

Godfrey

Godfrey acts, it ſeems to me, on the ſame rule as Agamemnon. The hermit Peter reſembles Calchas; but in theſe characters, there is nothing very brilliant, nor very defective. Renaud is among the Chriſtian heroes, what Achilles is amongſt thoſe of the Greeks. His courage is as impetuous, but his character is more amiable. The fall of Jeruſalem is reſerved for his ſword, as that of Troy is for the arms of Achilles. The abſence of the one is contraſted by the inaction of the other. Aladin only reſembles Priam, when he is a king in a beſieged city; and Argante is like Hector, only when he is the brave defender of Jeruſalem. Certainly the character of Hector is greater than that of Argante. The grandeur of Priam is more noble than that of Aladin, and his diſgraces are more touching. I will not

decide the point, whether Homer is in the right or wrong, in carrying our affection towards Hector, and exciting our pity in favour of Priam; but it is certain, that if Taſſo had not repreſented Aladin and Argante, ferocious and untractable; and if they had not been rendered hateful to the reader, he muſt have left them out of his plan.

Taſſo imitated Homer in the difference of his characters; but no author has ever drawn ſo many, with ſo viſible and ſurprizing a variety, or given us ſuch lively and affecting impreſſions of them, as the Grecian. Every one has ſomething ſo ſingularly his own, that no painter could have diſtinguiſhed them more by their features, than the poet has by their manners. Nothing can be more exact, than the diſtinctions he has obſerved

obſerved in the different degrees of virtues and vices. The ſingle quality of *courage* is wonderfully diverſified in the ſeveral characters of the Iliad. That of Achilles is furious and intractable; that of Diomede forward; yet, liſtening to advice, and ſubject to command. That of Ajax is heavy and ſelf confiding; of Hector, active and vigilant. The courage of Agamemnon is inſpirited by love of empire and ambition; that of Menelaus, mixed with ſoftneſs and tenderneſs for his people. We find in Idomeneus, a plain direct ſoldier; in Sarpedon, a gallant and generous one. Nor is this judicious and aſtoniſhing diverſity, to be found only in the principal quality which conſtitutes the main of each character, but even in the under part of it, to which he takes care to

give a tincture of that principal one *. Thus in Taſſo, alſo, Godfrey is ſage and moderate; Aladin is politic; the generous valour of Tancred does not reſemble the brutal impetuoſity of Argante. The love of Armida is a ſtrange coquetry; but that of Herminie is a ſoft and agréeable tenderneſs. Every one of his heroes are to be known by ſome ſingular mark, as in Homer ‖; but in this excellency it muſt be allowed he is much inferior.

Another art which Taſſo learned from that greateſt of all poets, is, the charming manner of intereſting us for his heroes; that talent which attracts our attention to the different adventures of his

* Pope's pref. to the Iliad. Vide works, vol. vii. p. 274. Alſo Spect. vol. iv. N°. 273.

‖ Eſſay ſur le Poëme Epique.

his poem; which makes us pass from the alarms of war to the delicacy of love; and recalling us from love to war, excites our sensibility by degrees, and keeps it continually increasing.

The style of Tasso is in general clear and elegant: in his descriptions, which demand energy and dignity, one is astonished to see how the natural softness of the Italian language is changed on a sudden to sublimity and force, and receives in his hands a new character: but notwithstanding this praise, yet his whole poem abounds with pitiful antitheses, even for a hundred lines together. His figures are frequently unsuitable to the passage to which he applies them. This is what Boileau calls *the tinsel of Tasso*; a censure however that has not been generally approved

proved of. *As for the poet himſelf, from whom the dreams of this opera are taken,* ſays Mr. Addiſon, ſpeaking of an Italian opera, the ſubject whereof had been borrowed of Taſſo, "I muſt entirely agree with Monſieur Boileau, that one verſe in Virgil is worth all the clinquant or tinſel of Taſſo*." It is true, notwithſtanding

* Tous les jours à la cour un ſot de qualité,
Peut juger de travers avec impunité ;
A Malherbe, a Racon préférer Théophile,
Et le clinquant du Taſſe à tout l'or de Virgile.

This line upon Taſſo, ſays Batteux, has been made a matter of great reproach to our poet. There is not a writer from the garret to the cellar, but what has had a ſtroke at him, under pretence of revenging ſo celebrated a name. But our critic remained unalterable in his deciſion. A little while before his death, he was aſked, whether he had not altered his opinion concerning that poet? "So far from it, replied he, that, upon reading "him

withſtanding, ſays the Abbé du Bos, if I be allowed to continue the figure, that we

" him over lately, I was very ſorry I had not ex-
" plained myſelf more at large upon this ſubject,
" in ſome of my reflections upon Longinus. I
" ſhould have begun by acknowledging Taſſo to
" have had a moſt ſublime and extenſive genius,
" and to have been born with the happieſt talents
" for poetry, and the nobleſt kind of it; but then,
" when I had come to conſider the uſe he has made
" of theſe talents, I ſhould have demonſtrated that
" he does not always excel in ſound ſenſe, being,
" in the greateſt part of his narrations, more at-
" tached to the pleaſing, than the neceſſary; that
" his deſcriptions are almoſt always loaded with
" ſuperfluous ornaments; that when he is paint-
" ing the ſtronger paſſions, and in the very midſt
" of the concern and trouble they have excited, he
" runs off into ſallies of wit, which immediately
" deſtroy the pathetic; that he is full of florid
" images, forced turns, and trifling thoughts,
" which are ſo far from being ſuitable to a poem
" like the Gieruſalemme, that they would hardly
" be

we diſcover very frequently the fineſt gold intermixed with this tinſel *. And Monſieur de Voltaire, ſpeaking of the ſame ſubject ſays, "But I regard theſe follies as a kind of tribute, which his great genius was willing to pay to the taſte which had commenced, and had been introduced into his nation."

But there are other faults of a different nature in Taſſo's poem, which are blamed in every country; for example, the epiſode of Olinda and Sophronia, in the com-

"be tolerable in his Aminta. Now, concluded "M. Deſpreaux, if we compare this with the mo- "deſty, gravity, and majeſty of Virgil, what elſe "is it better than tinſel ſet in competition with "gold?"

Hiſt. de l'Acad. Fr. tom. ii.

* Reflexions critiques, par du Bos, tom. I. ſect. 34.

commencement of the action, appears to me extremely ill judged. The poet brings into his ſcene a mahometan magician, named Iſmeno, who, againſt the known and inviolable laws of mahometaniſm, carries an image of the Virgin Mary into the principal moſque, for rendering by her force, the enchantments proof, for the ſecurity of the city, as formerly the fate of Troy depended upon the Palladium. He afterwards arrives one night, when the image is carried off. The Chriſtians of Jeruſalem being accuſed of the theft, the irritated ſultan condemns them all to death, for lying under the imputation of the crime; a thouſand of them were maſſacred at once. Nevertheleſs, Sophronia, a Chriſtian virgin, preſents herſelf before the ſultan, and beſeeched him to ſave the remaining Chriſtians, declaring in a generous

nerous manner, that ſhe had carried off the image. Aladin having condemned her to the flames, Olinda, her lover, undertook to ſave her life by another generous action. He declared, that he himſelf was only guilty, and mounted the pile of wood prepared for his miſtreſs. The one and the other were then condemned, and tied to the ſame ſtake. Immediately Clorinda arrived from Perſia, and, touched with compaſſion at ſeeing the two unhappy victims, and treating with contempt the witchcraft of Iſmeno, ſhe demands, and obtains their pardon; the two lovers went from their pile to the church, and were there married, and they have nothing more to do in the poem.

An epiſode, according to Ariſtotle and reaſon, ſhould not be taken from ſome-

thing

thing else, and added to the action; but should constitue a part of the action itself *. But this of Tasso is brought in with no skill, to answer no end. He has ornamented it with all the pomp and flowers of poetry. He attracts us with so much elegance in painting Sophronia, he speaks of the love of Olinda with so much warmth, and excites so much pity for both, that the reader is not able to persuade himself they are not the principal

* Χρὴ οὖν, χαθάπερ ἐν ταῖς ἄλλαις μιμητικαῖς ἡ μία μιμησις ἑνός ἐστιν, οὕτω καὶ τὸν μῦθον, ἐπεί πράξεως μίμησίς ἐστι, μιᾶς τε εἶναι, καὶ ταύτης ὅλης, καὶ τα μέρη συνεστάναι τῶν πραγμάτων οὕτως, ὥστε μετατι θεμένου τινὸς μέρους ἢ ἀφαιρουμένου, διαφέρεσθαι καὶ χινεῖσθαι τὸ ὅλον. ὃ γὰρ προσὸν ἢ μὴ προσόν, μηδὲν ποιεῖ ἐπίδηλον, οὐδὲ μόριον τοῦτό ἐστι. De poet. c. 8.

Τῶν δὲ ἁπλῶν μύθων καὶ πράξεων, αἱ Επεισοδιώδεις εἰσί χειρισται, λέγω δὲ Επεισοδιώδη μῦθον, εν ὦ τὰ ἐπεισόδια μετ, ἄλληλα οὐτ ειχὸς ουτ αναχγχη εἶνα. Ib. c. 9.

principal perſons in the poem. He is aſtoniſhed at ſeeing them as uſeleſs in the affairs of the Chriſtians, as the image of the Virgin Mary is to the mahometans. All the embelliſhments which Taſſo has prodigally beſtowed on this paſſage, only ſerve to render the fault more remarkable.

Yet I cannot wiſh theſe epiſodes out of the poem: it is true, they are vicious, if we judge them by the rules of epic poetry; but then their beauties are ſo ſtrikingly pleaſing, that we never tire in reading them *.

All

* What is the true notion of an epiſode? Or how is it to be diſtinguiſhed from what is really a part of the principal action? Every incident that promotes or retards the cataſtrophe, muſt be a part of the principal action. This clears the nature of

All the world agrees with the Italians, that nothing is painted with ſo much art as the coquetry of Armida; and that

of the epiſode; which may be defined, "An inci-"dent connected with the principal action, but "which contributes not either to advance or re-"tard it." The deſcent of Æneas into hell doth not advance or retard the cataſtrophe; and therefore is an epiſode. The ſtory of Niſus and Euryalus, producing an alteration in the affairs of the contending parties, is a part of the principal action. The family-ſcene in the ſixth book of the Iliad, is of the ſame nature; by Hector's retiring from the field of battle, to viſit his wife, the Grecians got liberty to breathe, and even to preſs upon the Trojans. It being thus the nature of an epiſode to break the unity of action, it ought never to be indulged, unleſs to refreſh and unbend the mind, after the fatigue of a long narration. This purpoſe of an epiſode demands the following properties. It ought to be well connected with the principal action; it ought to be ſhort; and it ought to be lively and intereſting.

Elements of Criticiſm, vol. iii. p. 251.

nothing is ſo tender as her love, ſo animated, moving, and touching as her complaints. The Engliſh and French, ſays Monſ. de Voltaire, although their taſte is far removed from ſupernatural things, founded on enchantment, ought to regard thoſe of Armida as the ſource of much beauty. It is certain that the Italians ſupported an exceſs of extravagance, and which Taſſo carried to the marvellous. Ten Chriſtian princes metamorphoſed into fiſhes in the baſons of Armida, and a parrot ſinging the gallant ſongs of her own compoſition, are quite romantic.

As truth is the ſoul of hiſtory, ſay the critics, ſo probability is the ſoul of poetry; and a poem that violates the rules of it, is ſo much the more defective, as the tranſgreſſion muſt be obvious to every

every one's cenſure. Admiration is oppoſed to probability. 'Tis the buſineſs of the laſt to reduce every thing into the moſt ſimple and moſt natural order; whereas, on the other hand, we never admire any thing, but what appears extraordinary, and out of the common road. This is that which deceives ſome, who, to make their heroes admired, raiſe them to what is impoſſible. This practice meets with a quite contrary effect; for if we would have a thing admired, we would make it ſo probable, that it may be conceived and credited. We never admire that which we think has actually never been; and all extravagant flights put us upon this thought *. By what we

* L'admiration eſt oppoſée à la vrai-ſemblance. Celle-ci veut tout réduire dans l'ordre

we have already ſaid, it is eaſy to diſcern that it is not the property of a poet, to relate things juſt as they came to paſs, but as they might, or ought neceſſarily or probably to happen *.

le plus ſimple & le plus naturel ; & nous n'admirons au-contraire, que ce qui nous paroit extraordinaire, & hors de l'uſage commun. C'eſt ce qui trompe ceux qui pour faire admirer leurs héroes, les élévent juſqu'à l'impoſſible. Cette conduite a un effet tot oppoſée ; parce-qu'une choſe pour etre admirée, doit etre dans une vraiſemblance qui la faſſe concevoir, & qui la faſſe croire. Nous n'admirons point ce que nous penſons actuellement n'avoir jamais été ; & les comportemens hors de toute meſure nous donnent cette penſée. *Poëme Epique*, p. 340.

* Φανερὸν δὲ ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων, ᾗ ὅτι οὐ τὸ τὰ γινόμενα λέγειν, τοῦτο ποιητοῦ ἔργον ἐστὶν, ἀλλ' οἷα ἂν γένοιτο, ᾗ τὰ δυνατὰ κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς, ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον. Ariſt. de Poet. c. 9.

We

We ſee with ſurpriſe in Taſſo, the maſs, confeſſion, the litanies of ſaints, and pieces of ſorcery, all confounded together. What a ſtrange phantaſy is it to ſend Ubaldic and his companion to an old and ſacred conjurer, who conducts them to the center of the earth? The two cavaliers are conveyed in a ſhip down a ſtream, full of precious ſtones of all ſorts. From thence they are ſent, by Aſcalon, towards an old woman, who tranſports them forthwith, in a little boat, to the Canary Iſlands, where they arrive, under the protection of God, holding in their hands a magic wand; and, having acquitted themſelves of their embaſſy, they are brought back to the camp of the Chriſtians, where the brave Renaud, and all the army, are in great want of them. Renaud is conducted by

enchantment from the Peak of Teneriff to Jeruſalem, being deſtined by Providence to cut down ſome old trees, in a foreſt infeſted by hobgoblins; and this foreſt is the great wonder of the poem. Afterwards, the magician Iſmeno takes poſſeſſion of the foreſt, where the Chriſtians are employed in cutting the neceſſary wood for the carpenter's work of a tower. Tancred there finds his Clorinda, locked up in a pine-tree; and wounds on a ſudden, what he imagines to be its trunk.

If we attempt to try ſuch fictions as theſe by the rules of criticiſm, we ſhall find they will not come within the definition of the poetic probability I juſt now quoted from Ariſtotle and Boſſu: It would be an abſurd thing to defend them,

them, by citations from theſe critics; but as machinery is allowed by the beſt, I ſhall venture, notwithſtanding what Voltaire has ſaid on the ſubject, to aſſert, that the great beauty of Taſſo's poem lies in theſe abſurd fictions and enchantments. I have given the reader ſome examples of theſe romantic inventions; to judge of them by our creed, the plain recital has no charms; but, in Taſſo, they are painted with all the rapid fire of imagination; his enchantments, and extravagant fictions, are cloathed with ſo noble a poetic ſtile; the genius of the poet was ſo unconfind, that it overflowed all bounds, like the Nile, and poured down one of the fineſt ſtreams of poetry the wit of man ever invented. Let the reader but compare the claſſical parts of the Gieruſalem-

me Liberata, with the enchantments, &c, he will at once perceive the former languid in compariſon of the latter *.

Monſ. de Voltaire tells us, that Taſſo's Gieruſalemme and Arioſto's Rolando exceed the Iliad and Odyſſey. His words are, " And if, without being biaſſed by prejudice, we put Homer's Odyſſey, and Arioſto's Orlando, into the balance, the Italian will be found to carry the prize from both, though guilty of the ſame defect with them, that of an intemperate imagination, and a romantic credibility. Arioſto has compenſated for this defect by

* Since the above was wrote, Mr. Hurd has publiſhed his *Letters on Chivalry*, by which I find the above opinion the ſame with that excellent critic's; which thoroughly convinces me of the truth of the obſervation.

ſuch

ſuch juſt allegories, ſuch nice ſatire, ſo thorough a knowledge of the human heart, ſo many comic graces, which are continually ſucceeding to the ſtrongeſt ſtrokes of terror, and, in a word, by ſuch innumerable beauties of every kind, that he has found the ſecret of forming a monſter that we cannot but admire.

With regard to the Iliad, let every reader aſk himſelf, what he would think if he was to read for the firſt time, this poem, and Taſſo's Gierуſalemme, without knowing the name of the authors, or the time when thoſe works were compoſed, and to judge only from the pleaſure he felt? Could he do otherwiſe than give the preference to Taſſo in all reſpects? Will he not find in the Italian more conduct, more intereſt, more variety,

ty, more juſtneſs, and a greater number of graces, with that delicacy which ſo enhances the ſublime? In a few ages more, perhaps, they will be no longer placed in compariſon." I can allow Taſſo and Arioſto their juſt merit. But yet I think quoting theſe words ſufficient to refute them: All Europe, even the beſt Italian critics, allow the unrivalled greatneſs of Homer; nor ſhall I ſuppoſe Voltaire's opinion of conſequence enough to bear down the united teſtimony of three thouſand years. Let me alſo obſerve, that this ſuperficial author, who aims at being univerſal, goes to the bottom of nothing. Several Italians, among the reſt Martinelli, have proved that he does not underſtand their language, although he has tranſlated it. It is certain that he ſhowed the moſt total ignorance of it,

when he rendered a paſſage in Dante into French; and as to the Greek, not a ſingle paſſage in all his works gives us the leaſt reaſon to aſſign him a greater knowledge of that language. But if the reader will compare what he ſays in his Eſſay on Epic Poetry, with the above quotations, he will perceive ſome abſolute contradictions.

Milton's divine poem of Paradiſe Loſt deſerves every commendation that we can beſtow on it. Yet it certainly has been praiſed, rather in a prejudiced manner by Mr. Addiſon. That critic, like Scaliger, was prejudiced in favour of his author; and ſeldom cares to point out the defects in the Paradiſe Loſt. A particular criticiſm on the beauties of that performance would now be tedious, as it is to be met with already in ſo popular a book as the

the Spectator: but there are ſome parts of it which being far from equal to the reſt of the poem, Mr. Addiſon has either paſſed over in ſilence, or palliated. Some of theſe I ſhall take the liberty to quote, not with deſign to attack the memory of the greateſt poetical genius our nation ever produced (that taſk I leave to the Lauders of the age) but to give a fair criticiſm on what Mr. Addiſon has omitted to mention.

In reſpect of fable, the above-mentioned critic has pointed out the principal defects in that of the Paradiſe Loſt; but in ſpeaking of the characters, I think he is too particular in his praiſe, when he ſays, "The angels are as much diverſified in Milton, and diſtinguiſhed by their proper parts, as the gods are in Homer and Virgil*."

gil *." I cannot apprehend this to be the caſe; there is to be ſure ſome difference between them, but then it is but paint, and not ſo ſtrikingly characteriſtical as thoſe of Homer.

Indeed it was not in Milton's power to make any ſtriking and characteriſtical difference between his angels; for how can we comprehend that mixture and variety of traits in them, which form the characters of men, ſuch as Homer drew. A divine brightneſs muſt blaze in all, and conſequently there muſt be a ſameneſs throughout them; for one paſſion or affection, though it may be variouſly painted, if, when it reigns in ſo many characters in the ſame poem, it will prevent ſuch vaſt variety as we

* Spectator, Vol. IV. N° 273.

meet

meet with in Homer. Another defect taken no notice of by Mr. Addiſon, is the want of a hero; for Dryden was certainly miſtaken, when he ſaid the devil was Milton's hero *. Nor can the Meſſiah be

* Preface to Virgil. But tho' the Devil is not the hero', yet many of the moſt beautiful paſſages are thrown into his part. Mr. Webb has a very fine obſervation on this ſubject; his words are, "Such images as are in motion, and which, by a gradual enlargement, keep our ſenſes in ſuſpence, are more intereſting than thoſe, which owe their power to a ſingle impreſſion, and are perfect at their firſt appearance. Where there can be no gradation in an object, its influence on the mind is immediately determined". In this obſervation, we ſee the reaſon why the principal beauties in Paradiſe Loſt have been naturally thrown on the perſon of Satan. To deſcribe a permanent and unchangeable glory, is to paint without ſhades; the ſun is more delightful in its ſetting than in its meridian. The divine perfection, pure and

be ſuppoſed one, as Mr. Addiſon ſays; for there is a unity of hero as well as fable: Boſſu tells us, " L'exactitude de nos poëtes nous préſente une unité dans le caractére, que nous ne pouvons omettre ſans y faire réfléxion. Elle eſt obſervée dans la conduite du héros en particulier, & dans celle de tout le poëme; & je penſe que l'on peut appliquer à l'une & a l'autre la premier régle d'Ho-

and angelic natures, can have no clouds, no contraſts; they are all one blaze. But it is not ſo in the deſcription of fallen greatneſs; of diminiſhed and interrupted ſplendor; of a ſuperior nature ſunk and diſgraced, but emerging at intervals from its degradation. This is a ſubject ſo truly poetic, it gives riſe to ſuch a ſtrain of fluctuating images, that let the object be ever ſo obnoxious, if the danger, as in the preſent caſe, be remote, it ſeizes on the imagination, all calmer conſiderations are thrown aſide, and the ſenſes are hurried away beyond the reach of reflection.

Remarks on the Beauties of Poetry, p. 84.

race,

race, qui ordonne que tout ſoit réduit dans la ſimplicité & dans l'unité. Il ſemble en effet, que le caractere n'eſt pas moins l'ame du héros & de toute l'action, que la fable l'eſt du poëme ; & par conſequent, il ſemble exiger une unité auſſi exacte †." This unity of hero is not only neceſſary in compliance to received rules ; but a poem that has a hero, muſt neceſſarily be more entertaining than one without, if they are equal in every thing elſe, as we are much more pleaſed with attending a perſonage, rendered great or amiable by the poet, in all his adventures or actions, than with a ſet of actions that do not concur to ſet off ſome principal character, and which are thereby loſt for want of ſupporting each other.

† Traité du Poeme Epique, p. 101.

In

In regard to ſentiment and language, Mr. Addiſon, throughout his criticiſm, has taken notice of the moſt beautiful; and has juſtly obſerved, that Milton's greateſt excellency conſiſts in the ſublimity of his ſentiments. Indeed, no author, without excepting Homer himſelf, is ſo wonderfully ſublime as Milton in ſome parts of his poem. I ſhall forbear quoting theſe, as they are in every one's mouth; but I muſt take notice of a ſtriking defect, which Mr. Addiſon but juſt mentions: and this is in the ſentiments and language aſcribed to the Father and Son. When we find the Deity ſpeaks, we cannot but expect ſomething peculiarly noble and majeſtic; inſtead of which, we ſeldom meet with any thing but divine littleneſſes and quibbles.

The following lines will ſerve as an inſtance.

Such I created all th' etherial powers
And ſpirits, both them who ſtood and them who fail'd;
Freely they ſtood who ſtood, and fell who fell.
Not free, what proof could they have giv'n ſincere
Of true allegiance, conſtant faith or love,
Where only what they needs muſt do appear'd,
Not what they would? What praiſe could they receive?
What pleaſure I from ſuch obedience paid,
When will and reaſon (reaſon alſo is choice)
Uſeleſs and vain, of freedom both deſpoil'd,
Made paſſive both, had ſerv'd neceſſity,
Not me? They therefore as to right belong'd
So were created, nor can juſtly accuſe
Their maker, or their making, or their fate,
As if predeſtination over-rul'd
Their will, diſpos'd by abſolute decree
Or high foreknowledge; they themſelves decreed
Their own revolt, not I; if I foreknew,
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
Which had no leſs prov'd certain unforeknown.

So

So without leaſt impulſe or ſhadow of fate,
Or ought by me immutably foreſeen,
They treſpaſs, authors to themſelves in all,
Both what they judge, and what they chooſe; for ſo
I form'd them free, and free they muſt remain,
'Till they inthral themſelves; I elſe muſt change
Their nature, and revoke the high decree
Unchangeable, eternal, which ordain'd
Their freedom; they themſelves ordain'd their fall.
The firſt ſort by their own ſuggeſtion fell,
Self-tempted, ſelf-deprav'd: man falls, deceiv'd
By th' other firſt; man therefore ſhall find grace,
The other none: in mercy and juſtice both,
Through heav'n and earth ſo ſhall my glory excel,
But mercy firſt and laſt ſhall brighteſt ſhine*.

The firſt reading of this extract will diſcover it to be a collection of quirks and quibbles; the whole quite proſaic, and utterly devoid of the leaſt ſpark of genius. It is wonderful the genius of Milton did not exert itſelf in the ſpeeches of

* Book III. 100.

the Divinity. Homer always paints Jupiter with an infinite deal of grandeur and majeſty, and many moſt noble ſpeeches are put into his mouth; but, throughout the Paradiſe Loſt, the Almighty is tedious, languid, and proſaic. Soon after he ſays,

——— For I will clear their ſenſes dark,
What may ſuffice, and ſoften ſtony hearts
To pray, repent, and bring obedience due,
To pray'r, repentance, and obedience due.
Tho' but endeavour'd with ſincere intent,
Mine ear ſhall not be ſlow, mine eye not ſhut *.

I could quote twenty paſſages to ſhew how void of all ſpirit Milton generally is when he makes the Deity ſpeak. Mr. Addiſon, when he hints at this fault, mentions his keeping to the ſcriptures as the reaſon. But ſurely this is a poor ex-

* Book iii. 187.

cuſe:

cuſe: had Milton been writing a treatiſe of divinity, he might have kept as cloſe to their letter as he pleaſed; but why, when he is compoſing a poem, why ſhould he not have given up every conſideration to indulge his luxuriant imagination in the ſpeeches of the Divinity, as well as in other tranſactions which he places in heaven? The introduction of artillery thither has no foundation in ſcripture, and is one of the boldeſt and nobleſt thoughts he could have invented. Why not have uſed the ſame freedom in the ſpeeches? God, as he has painted him, is generally a ſchool-divine; would it not have been more religious to have given him great and noble ſentiments, and ſublime language, inſtead of puns and quibbles?

Another great fault in the Paradiſe Loſt, is the affected ſhow of learning,

which Mr. Addiſon only mentions as a blemiſh, and even in the ſame breath palliates it by telling us, that Milton was acquainted with all the learning of his time. Some paſſages of his poem are ſo ſtuffed with this abominable affectation, that the reader is diſguſted to the laſt degree with his tedious digreſſions to diſplay his erudition. Speaking of Satan's priding himſelf in his numbers, he ſays, that there never was ſuch a numerous hoſt.

——— Though all the giant brood
Of Phlegra with th' heroic race were join'd
That fought at Thebes and Ilium, on each ſide
Mix'd with auxiliar gods; and what reſounds
In fable or romance of Arthur's ſon,
Begirt with Britiſh and Armoric knights;
And all who ſince, baptiz'd or infidel,
Jouſted in Aſpramont, or Montalban,
Damaſco, or Morocco, or Trebiſond,

Or

Or whom Biſerta ſent from Afric ſhore,
When Charlemain with all his peerage fell
By Fontarabbia ——— *

And again,

As when Alcides, from Oechalia crown'd
With conqueſt, felt th' envenom'd robe, and tore
Through pain up by the roots Theſſalian pines,
And Lichas from the top of Oeta threw
Into th' Euboic ſea † ———

And ſoon after,

As when far off at ſea a fleet deſcry'd
Hangs in the clouds, by equinoctial winds
Cloſe ſailing from Bengala, or the iſles
Of Ternate and Tidore, whence merchants bring
Their ſpicy drugs: they on the trading flood
Through the wide Ethiopian to the cape
Ply ſtemming mightly tow'rd the pole ‡.

Again, in the ſame book,

And more endanger'd than when Argo paſs'd
Thro' Boſporus betwixt the juſtling rocks;

* Book i. 576. † Book ii. 542. ‡ Ib. ii. 636.

Or when Ulyſſes on the larboard ſhunn'd
Charybdis, and by th' other whirlpool ſteer'd *.

In the third book we alſo find,

The builders next of Babel on the plain
Of Sennaar, and ſtill with vain deſign
New Babels, had they wherewithal, would build:
Others came ſingle; he who to be deem'd
A god, leapt fondly into Ætna flames,
Empedocles; and he, who to enjoy
Plato's elyſium, leap'd into the ſea,
Cleombrotus; and many more too long,
Embryo's and idiots, eremits, and friers
White, black, and grey, with all their trumpery †.

What can be more contemptible than this oſtentation of learning? So far from admiring the genius of a poet on that account, we cannot but deſpiſe ſuch vanity. Boſſu ‡ very juſtly obſerves, that the

* Book ii. 1017. † Book iii. 466.

‡ La doctrine affectée & la connoiſſance de toutes les ſciences & de tous les arts, eſt encore un écueil

the affected ſtudy and knowledge of all arts and ſciences is a dangerous rock to the

écueil dangereux pour la vanité des ecrivains: Si poete doit tout ſavoir, ce n'eſt pas pour debiter ſa ſcience, & pour faire voir l'étenduë de ſon eſprit; mais pour ne rien dire qui le faſſe paroitre ignorant, & pour parler correctement en quelques rencontres. Il faut meme que ces rencontres ſoient naturelles, qu'elles paroiſſent inévitables, & non recherchées. Nous en avons vu un exemple dans le doctrine de l'immortalité de l'ame, que Virgile ſi judicieuſement, & ſi néceſſairement placée en ſon ſixieme livre.—Il eſt ſi aiſé d'emploïer en un poeme les termes de toutes ſortes d'arts, que c'eſt y faire peu de réflexion, ou avoir l'eſprit bien mediocre, que d'ambitionner la louange de l'avoir fait. Il ne faut que lire un livre que traite de l'art dont on veut parler; ou s'entretenir avec quelque artiſan: & puis, faire voir ce que l'on aura écrit a quelqu'un qui l'entende. Un auteur ſera bien miſérable s'il n'en vient à bout par ce moin: mais il ne ſera pas fort habile pour y avoir reuſſi. Jamais un grand poëte n'aura cette baſſe & inutile vanité

the vanity of writers. Though a poet ſhould know every thing; yet it is not with a deſign he ſhould vent his ſcience by retail, and let the world ſee the extent of his learning: but then he may ſay nothing that ſhould argue him ignorant; and that he may ſpeak correctly upon ſeveral occaſions, it is requiſite likewiſe, that theſe occaſions be natural, and ſuch as appear unavoidable and unſought for. We have ſeen one inſtance of this in the doctrine of the immortality of the ſoul, which Virgil has ſo ju-

voulu dans un poeme epique. Qu'il apprenne, & qu'il ſache tout; mais ſeulement pour s'en ſervir comme nous avons dit; & qu'il le faſſe en employant les termes les plus communs & les plus intelligibles qu'il pourra. Il ne faut jamais géner inutilement l'eſprit de ſes lecteurs: les paſſions & le plaiſir demandent un grand degagement de tout le reſte.

Traité du Poeme Epique, p. 238.

diciouſly

diciouſly and neceſſarily placed in his ſixth book.—It is ſo eaſy to make uſe of all manner of terms of art in a poem, that a man muſt be one of little thought, and a mean ſoul, that ſhall be ambitious of the praiſe of having done it. There needs only the reading over a book of the art one would ſpeak of, or converſing with an artificer, and after that to make ſome one or other that underſtands it, ſee what we have writ about it. An author will be a pitiful creature if he does not attain his end by this means; but he will not be much the more learned for having ſucceeded therein. A great poet will never ſtoop to ſo low and uſeleſs a vanity in an epic poem. Let him indeed learn and know every thing; but then let him make uſe of this his knowledge, as we before adviſed; and let him do it by uſing the moſt common, and the moſt intelligible

gible terms he can. The minds of his readers muſt never be burdened, when there is no occaſion for it: the paſſions and pleaſure of a poem require an entire freedom from every thing elſe.

In the inſtances I quote of Milton's vanity, I take only thoſe that are moſt remarkable, I need not tell the reader thoſe I tranſcribe bear no proportion to them I take no notice of. In his fourth book, he has

——— Not that fair field
Of Enna, where Proſerpin gathering flowers,
Herſelf a fairer flow'r by gloomy Dis
Was gather'd, which coſt Ceres all that pain
To ſeek her thro' the world; nor that ſweet grove
Of Daphne by Orontes, and th' inſpir'd
Caſtalian ſpring, might with this Paradiſe
Of Eden ſtrive; nor that Nyſeian iſle
Girt with the river Triton, where old Cham,
Whom Gentiles Ammon call and Lybian Jove,

Hid

Hid Amalthea and her florid ſon
Young Bacchus from his ſtep-dame Rhea's eye;
Nor where Abaſſin kings their iſſue guard
Mount Amara, though this by ſome ſuppos'd
True Paradiſe under the Ethiop line
By Nilus' head, incloſed with ſhining rock *.

Milton's deſign was plainly to ſhew his learning, and not to raiſe a higher idea of Paradiſe in the minds of his readers: a man muſt have ſome ſhare of learning to underſtand what he means; and as he cannot have ſo lively an idea of theſe gardens which the poet quotes, as of his own, this train of affected learning can ſerve no purpoſe. Mr. Addiſon alſo objects to his mixing ſo much heathen learning in ſuch a poem as the Paradiſe Loſt. In his ninth book we find him among his heathens again.

* Book iv. 268.

To

To Pales or Pomona, thus adorn'd,
Likeſt ſhe ſeem'd, Pomona when ſhe fled
Vertumnus, or to Ceres in her prime;
Yet virgin of Proſerpina from Jove *.

And again, in the ſame book,

——— Never ſince of ſerpent kind
Lovelier, not thoſe that in Illyria chang'd
Hermione and Cadmus, or the God
In Epidaurus; nor to which transform'd
Ammonian Jove, or Capitoline was ſeen,
He with Olympias, this with her who bore
Scipio the heighth of Rome †. ———

In the tenth book the reader muſt underſtand aſtronomy.

——— Some ſay the ſun
Was bid turn reins from th' equinoctial road,
Like diſtant breadth to Taurus with the ſeven
Atlantic ſiſters, and the Spartan twins
Up to the tropic crab; thence down amain
By Leo and the virgin and the ſcales
As deep as Capricorn ‡. ———

* Book ix. 392. † Ibid. 503. ‡ Book x. 671.

In

In the eleventh book, at the 388th line, the reader may exerciſe his geographic learning. As to other defects which Mr. Addiſon takes little notice of, I cannot think the bad angels in the ſecond book are characteriſed in that ſtriking manner Mr. Addiſon mentions. Homer's excellency in this particular appears in the ſtrongeſt colours, without giving any particular attention to the traits which compoſe them; but in Milton we don't find this variety, and the diſtinction between his devils is but faint, and requires a cloſe attention to perceive it.—All that part of the third book which contains the ſpeeches in heaven, is proſaic and utterly devoid of genius, except in ſome ſhort paſſages which blaze here and there among the ſtuff that ſurrounds them.—I may ſay the ſame of the ſix days creation in the 7th book; which is quite

quite proſaic, tedious, and far from being pleaſing to the imagination: nevertheleſs Mr. Addiſon ſays, "This book is an inſtance of that ſublime which is not mixed and worked up with paſſion: the author appears in a kind of ſedate majeſty; and though the ſentiments do not give ſo great an emotion as thoſe in the former book, they give as magnificent ideas." If the reader will conſult his feeling (by much the propereſt teſt in reading poetry) he will perceive this criticiſm falſe.—The firſt part of the 10th book, containing the ſon's judgment of Adam and Eve, I regard in the ſame light; it contains little or no poetry, and is very tedious. Adam's ſoliloquy, which continues from the 720th line to the 840th, is alſo proſaic and unentertaining.—The 12th book is of all the reſt the moſt tedious, proſaic and languid, it is enlive-

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ned with few or no touches of Milton's ſublime poetry.

As I have been thus free in expreſſing my notions on the defects of this noble poem, it would ſeem malignity rather than truth, if I was not at the ſame time to mention its beauties. I ſhould not have been ſo particular on the faulty part, if Mr. Addiſon had made his criticiſm quite impartial, and given us his ideas on beauties and defects without letting his judgment be warped by his veneration for the author. There are many defects I have taken no notice of, merely becauſe that critic has done it before me, ſuch as the allegory of Death and Sin, limbo of vanity, &c. &c. &c. As to excellencies, there are but few which he has not pointed out; therefore any particular quotations from the beautiful

parts of this *divine epic poem* would be needleſs, as they are to be met with in ſo popular a book as the Spectator; but I cannot help juſt obſerving, that the whole firſt book is extremely fine, and the deſcription of Pandemonium in particular, moſt ſublimely imagined; that the latter part of the ſecond is infinitely great, and diſplays a vaſt invention: that the deſcription of Paradiſe in the fourth, is ſuperior in its kind to any thing that ever was compoſed: but deſcriptive poetry, or at leaſt that which is merely ſo, cannot diſplay ſuch invention as the more animated parts of the poem. The latter part of the fifth, is alſo very fine, and the ſixth preſents us with ſome of the ſublimeſt ſtrokes of poetry that could enter into the warmeſt imagination to conceive; and diſplays an immenſe invention, ſuperior, I think, to any thing elſe

elſe in Milton. In fine, the eighth and ninth books are beautiful, natural, and pleaſing.

I cannot here avoid taking notice of an aſſertion concerning epic poetry which Dr. Warburton has thrown out in his Divine Legation of Moſes *. " Our own countryman, the great Milton, produced the third ſpecies of the epic poem; for juſt as Virgil rivalled Homer, ſo Milton emulated both. He found Homer poſſeſſed of the province of *morality*, Virgil of *politics*; and nothing left for him but that of *religion*. There are three ſpecies of the epic poem; for its largeſt province is human action, which can be conſidered but in a *moral*, a *political*, or a *religious* view; and theſe are the three great creators of them; for each of theſe poems was ſtruck out at a heat, and came to

* Vol. I. p. 188. 1ſt edit.

perfection from its firſt eſſay. Here then the grand ſcene is cloſed, and further improvements of the epic at an end."— An aſſertion almoſt as poſitive as it is abſurd. The whole of this criticiſm is founded on an old, but refuted notion of Homer's having wrote his Iliad on a *moral*, the moſt ridiculous fancy that ever entered into the head of a critic. There are many maxims, political and religious, and phyſical, as well as moral, which may be drawn from that poem, and which it inculcates as ſtrongly: but whence did this critic gain his ſpirit of prophecy, foretelling that all improvements of the epic are at an end? Is his reaſon grounded on no ſtronger foundation than Homer having filled the province of morality? If that's the argument he urges, it may be replied, that we have no reaſon to believe either Homer, Virgil or Mil-

ton

ton fixed on any moral whatever to inculcate in their poems, and that ſome future poet (whether they did or not) may bear away the palm even in their own track of perfection. Such bold aſſertions as lay a reſtraint on the very powers of human nature, are far from ſhewing the doctor's critical judgment, and ſavour too much of ſelf-ſufficiency to be received by the public with any kind of approbation.

It is very eaſy to diſcover the original of the miſtaken notion of Homer's firſt inventing a moral.

Father Boſſu * not having begun to ſtudy Ariſtotle's poeticks, till he was acquainted with Æſop's fables, no ſooner found the name of fable given to the ac-

* Traité du Poeme Epique, l. 1. cap. 6.

tion of a poem, than he fancied that this action, like apologues, muſt have two eſſential parts, to wit, fiction and moral truth. With this prepoſſeſſion he ſet himſelf to ſearch for this notion in our author; and it was not very difficult for him to find it in the way he went to work. He ſeparated what Ariſtotle adds to explain his definition of fable, from what went before and follows, and conſidered it by itſelf: and thus he came to make our philoſopher ſay, that fable is a mixture of fiction and truth. *The compoſition of things* may indeed ſignify that in our language, as well as any other mixture one pleaſes: but it does not ſignify it in the paſſage we are conſidering; becauſe the author is there ſpeaking merely of the connexion between the things which neceſſarily enter into the action of a poem, viz. characters and

and ſentiments; not to mention that the term *mixture*, which is very proper for the uſe the interpreter makes of it, preſents a quite different idea from that belonging to the word σύνθεσις uſed by Ariſtotle.

Could one have imagined, that this miſtake would have had ſuch conſequences? Nothing has done more honour to father Boſſu than the new rule, and the application he hath made of it to the three poems which antiquity hath tranſmitted to us with ſuch high encomiums. All the learned ſince have imagined, that Homer compoſed his Iliad to teach the Greeks the advantages of union, and all the reſt that we find in his treatiſe upon an epic poem. It has been again and again repeated in proſe and verſe, and M. Dacier himſelf has ſpoken

of it as well as others, though he hath very well taken up father Boſſu for his miſtake.

If I would find the duties of a prince in the ſame action of the Iliad, I would not have great difficulty to diſcover in it almoſt the ſame Horace ſaw,

Quidquid delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi.

Kings are ſo much the more obliged to take reaſon for their guide, and to maſter their paſſions, as the conſequences of their faults are direful to vaſt numbers of perſons. It is the injuſtice of Agamemnon which brought the Greeks into imminent danger, and they are victorious when this injuſtice is repaired.

But I will yield that we may ſee in this fable, in ſome ſort, what they would have

have to be in it, viz. *That harmony is neceſſary to the ſucceſs of great undertakings; and that diſſention ruins them:* yet I cannot but ſay, that theſe are actions to which this truth would agree more exactly; for in the caſe of an army, in which there are many valiant princes, it is morally incredible, that the retiring of one who had ſo few troops ſhould have ſuch grand conſequences; and that of Achilles really had them, only becauſe Jupiter was reſolved to avenge the affront done him. In fine, let them find this moral in it; ſince they are accuſtomed to do ſo, I conſent to it, and purely to ſhew that Homer did not propoſe this moral, and that it was not for it he compoſed this poem, I affirm, that the greater part of the fable contains another, which agrees much better with it. In fact, what one perceives immediately,

and

and what Homer intended ſhould ſtrike moſt, is the anger of Achilles, cauſed by the injuſtice of Agamemnon: one ſees afterwards the conſequences of this wrath which I have deſcribed; and in them one finds, without any ſtraining, this truth, that the maſter of the gods intereſts himſelf in favour of thoſe who are unjuſtly treated; but that reſentment ought to be kept within bounds, and to yield to the love of one's country, if he would not draw ſome miſchief upon himſelf, as Achilles did, who loſt his friend, by being obſtinate in his anger *.

Mr.

* But thoſe who are fond of father Boſſu's ſyſtem, will not pardon me, if I do not find out the particular moral which Homer has inculcated in his Iliad: and though I can by no means think, with that author, that an epic writer firſt of all pitches upon a certain moral, as the ground-work and

Mr. Glover, though not one of the greateſt epic poets, deſerves to be ranked among them for his Leonidas, a poem which

and foundation of his poem, and afterwards forms a ſtory to it; yet, as I am of opinion that no heroic poem ever was, or can be made, from whence ſome great moral may not be deduced, I ſhall briefly conſider the maxims which occur upon reading the Iliad. The firſt is, that the divinity preſides over all, and acts in all, and that nothing is done without it: this ſeems to be the principal moral Homer has in view. The ſecond is, that oftentimes thoſe who beg heaven to avenge them, have reaſon, at length, to repent having their prayers heard: this ariſes from the action. When I conſider Agamemnon's behaviour, and the conſequences of it, I am ready to agree that we ſhould not incenſe thoſe of whom we may ſtand in need. When I conſider Achilles, I reflect, that the pleaſure of revenge often coſts men too dear. On conſidering the Greeks and Trojans, I find that the people are often puniſhed for the folly or madneſs of the prince: and laſtly, I ſhall ſay, in ſeeing the effects

which I ſhall take a ſhort review of. An epic poem is ſo great and arduous a taſk, that any attempt to add to the liſt of them ſhews at leaſt an ambition, which, if tolerably founded, is worthy of the utmoſt candour and encouragement.

The fable of this poem has that unity and that greatneſs which Ariſtole requires, excepting the epiſode of Ariana, which is certainly vicious, becauſe it has no connection with the action, but only with one of the perſonages, and may be taken out of the poem without hurting the

fects produced by the preſence and abſence of Achilles, that two men together are ſtronger than one without the other. Theſe, now, are all very good maxims; but not one of them, I am perſuaded, ever contributed to form the ground-work or foundation of Homer's poetical edifice.

Batteux Princip. of Lit. vol. ii. p. 169.

the fable: it is a diſtinct action of itſelf, which can only divide the intereſt of the principal perſonage, and weaken the reader's attention to his fate. Another defect in the fable is its end being unhappy, which is more ſuited to the dramatic than the epic poetry. It may be ſaid, that the death of Leonidas being to the higheſt degree glorious, is happy, but it is not that ſpecies of happineſs with which a poet ought to clothe his hero; and this fault is very particular in the poem before us, for the death of the hero is foretold in the very firſt book, and from that time, as we know what will be the event of the poem, our ſuſpence of mind, which is ſo pleaſing in the Iliad and Æneid, &c. is at an end.

The characters are varied; but not in that fine degree, which makes the poems

of

of Homer ſo infinitely pleaſing, and which Virgil himſelf could not imitate with ſucceſs. The moſt perfect is Leonidas, which is indeed diſtinctly drawn, being placed in a greater variety of lights than any of the reſt; in the council, in the army, in his family, in his retirements, we ſee the ſame exalted notions, the ſame love of virtue and his country, which conſtantly animates all his actions: and although this character might at firſt ſeem too ſublime to be natural, yet it muſt be allowed that Leonidas is painted in ſuch proper colours, and every where agreeing ſo well, that we ſee nothing unnatural in him. The inferior perſonages have nothing very extraordinary, to mention particularly: there are diſtinctions between them, but I cannot ſay they are lively and bold.

The

The ſentiments are noble and generous throughout, finely adapted to a poem whoſe action is founded on a moſt heroic love of one's country and contempt of death. There is a ſpirit of virtue, and a certain ſolemnity in the whole poem, that ought always to attend the epic poem.

A few fine ſpeeches will give a ſtrong idea of the hero. When he takes leave of his queen and children, he ſays,

I ſee, I feel thy anguiſh, nor my ſoul
Has ever known the prevalence of love,
E'er prov'd a father's fondneſs as this hour;
Nor, when moſt ardent to aſſert my fame,
Was once my heart inſenſible to thee.
How had it ſtain'd the honours of my name
To heſitate a moment, and ſuſpend
My country's fate, till ſhameful life, preferr'd
By my inglorious colleague, left no choice,

But

But what in me were infamy to ſhun,
Not virtue to accept? Then deem no more,
That of thy love regardleſs, or thy tears,
I haſte uncall'd to death. The voice of fate,
The gods, my fame, my country bids me bleed.
—Oh! thou dear mourner! wherefore ſtreams afreſh
That flood of woe? Why heaves with ſighs renew'd
That tender breaſt? Leonidas muſt fall.
Alas! far heavier miſery impends
O'er thee and theſe, if, ſoften'd by thy tears,
I ſhamefully refuſe to yield that breath
Which juſtice, glory, liberty, and heav'n
Claim for my country, for my ſons, and thee.
Think on my long unalter'd love. Reflect
On my paternal fondneſs. Has my heart
E'er known a pauſe of love or pious care?
Now ſhall that care, that tenderneſs be prov'd
Moſt warm and faithful. When thy huſband dies
For Lacedemon's ſafety, thou wilt ſhare,
Thou and thy children, the diffuſive good.
Should I thus ſingled from the reſt of men,
Alone intruſted by th' immortal gods
With pow'r to ſave a people, ſhould my ſoul
Deſert that ſacred cauſe, thee too I yield

To

To ſorrow and to ſhame; for thou muſt weep
With Lacedæmon, muſt with her ſuſtain
Thy painful portion of oppreſſion's weight.
Thy ſons behold now worthy of their names,
And Spartan birth. Their growing bloom muſt pine
In ſhame and bondage, and their youthful hearts
Beat at the ſound of liberty no more.
On their own virtue and their father's fame,
When he the Spartan freedom hath confirm'd,
Before the world illuſtrious ſhall they riſe,
Their country's bulwark, and their mother's joy.

This ſpeech is extremely noble, and being in the firſt book gives us a fine inſight into the character of Leonidas. In the next book he harangues the council. There is an infinite deal of fire in the following paſſage in his ſpeech.

——————— Let us all
Be link'd in ſacred union, and the Greeks
Shall ſtand the world's whole multitude in arms.
If for the ſpoil which Paris bore to Troy,

A thouſand barks the Helleſpont o'erſpread;
Shall not again confederated Greece
Be rous'd to battle, and to freedom give,
What once ſhe gave to fame? ———

In the ſeventh book, Xerxes ſends Argeſtes to tempt Leonidas with the ſovereignty of all Greece, if he would yield to his arms: the king having heard his propoſals, leads the ambaſſador amidſt the Grecian bands, and then anſwers,

Here, Perſian, tell thy embaſſy, repeat
That to obtain my friendſhip Aſia's lord
Bids me accept the ſov'reignty of Greece;
Then view this band, whoſe valour ſhall preſerve
That Greece unconquer'd, which their king beſtows,
And ſtrew your bodies on its crimſon plains;
The indignation painted on their looks
And generous ſcorn ſhall anſwer for their chief.

I take theſe to be three of the fineſt ſpeeches in the poem, and all of them fully

fully diſplay the undaunted character of Leonidas. The inferior perſonages have nothing very extraordinary to mention particularly; indeed the fierce intrepidity of Diomedon is well preſerved in the following ſpeech to Tigranes, the Perſian ambaſſador.

Thou ſervile, baſe dependant on a king,
Inglorious mercenary ſlave to thoſe
Whom moſt we ſcorn; thou boaſter, doſt thou know,
That I beheld the Marathonian field?
When like the Libyan ſands before the wind,
Your hoſt was ſcatter'd by th' unconquer'd Greeks,
Where thou perhaps didſt turn before your arms
To ignominious flight thy ſhiv'ring limbs;
O may I find thee in to-morrow's fight!
Then on the rocky pavement ſhalt thou lie,
Beneath this arm to feaſt the vulture's beak.

The language of Leonidas has nothing extraordinary, either to commend or blame much. It is generally equal, and alſo nervous and expreſſive. But there is a ſtiffneſs which often occurs that is diſpleaſing, and is owing to the ſhortneſs of his periods, as in the beginning of the ſeventh book.

Before the tent of Xerxes now arriv'd
The Perſian captives, on with ſolemn pace
And ſlow they move. The monarch from afar
Deſcries their ſad demeanour. They approach,
Nor he forbids. That morn had rumour told
The loſs of half his navy daſh'd on rocks
By angry blaſts, or buried in the ſurge.
Thus, when his bleeding ſiſter met his eyes,
Already ſunk in ſadneſs, he had loſt
His kingly pride the parent of diſdain,
And cold indifference for others woes;
Nor ev'n beſide his ſiſter's nobler corſe
Her humble lover now his ſcorn awak'd
In tears the captive's mournful tale he heard,
And then firſt knew compaſſion———

Similar

Similar paſſages to this the reader will meet with very often, which leſſens greatly the harmony of his language; yet in many reſpects it deſerves praiſe. In his metaphors he is ſometimes very happy and poetic. The following is a fine inſtance.

—— His glitt'ring ſhield,
Whoſe ſpacious orb collects th' effulgent beams,
Which from his throne meridian Phœbus caſt,
Flames like another ſun. ——

Theſe laſt words are in the ſpirit of Milton, and finely imagined. Again,

As in ſome torrid region, where the head
Of Ceres bends beneath its golden load,
If on the parching ground a fatal ſpark
Fall from a burning brand; the ſudden blaze,
Increas'd and aided by tumultuous winds
In rapid torrents of involving flames,
Sweeps o'er the crackling plain, and mounting high

In ruddy ſpires illumines half the ſkies;
Not with leſs ſwiftneſs thro' the glowing ranks
The works of great Leonidas diffus'd
A more than mortal fervour. ———

He compares the queen of Sparta in tears to the light of the moon in a miſt.

As when a duſky miſt involves the ſky,
The moon thro' all the dreary vapours ſpreads
The radiant veſture of its ſilver light
O'er the dull face of nature. ———

And the vaſt number of Xerxes's white pavilions on a boundleſs plain, to the Atlantic ocean.

——— Like the vaſt Atlantic, when no ſhore,
No rock, or promontory ſtops the ſight,
Unbounded, as it wanders; but the moon,
Reſplendent eye of night, in fulleſt orb
Throughout th' interminated ſurface throws
Its rays abroad, and decks in ſnowy light
The dancing billows. ———

He compares the momentary happineſs of Teribazus, in his love for Ariana, to ſcattered beams of light appearing among the wintry clouds.

Like wintry clouds, which op'ning for a time,
Tinge their black ſkirts with ſcatter'd beams of day;
Then ſwiftly cloſing, on the brows of morn
Condenſe their horrors, and in thickeſt gloom
The ruddy beauty veil. ———

And the ſilent ſuſpence of the Grecians waiting for the ſignal of battle, to louring clouds, which

——— expanding from the north,
Awhile ſuſpend their horrors, deſtin'd ſoon
To blaze in lightnings, and to burſt in ſtorms.

The Perſian camp, after the dreadful expedition of Leonidas, to nature after a ſtorm.

As in ſome fruitful clime, which late hath known
The rage of winds and floods, when now the ſtorm

Is heard no longer, and the deluge fled,
Still o'er the wafted region nature mourns
In melancholy ſilence, through the grove,
With proſtrate glories lie the ſtately oak
And elm uprooted, while the plains are ſpread
With fragments, ſwept from villages o'erthrown,
And round the paſtures, flocks and herds are caſt
In weltring heaps of death. ———

One ſimile more I muſt quote; he compares Leonidas defending himſelf againſt innumerable Perſians, to thunder and lightning ſtriking againſt a hill.

——— Like a Thracian hill,
Like Rhodopé or Hæmus; where in vain
The thunderer plants his livid bolt, in vain
The glancing lightning cleaves th' incruſted ſnow,
And winter beating with eternal war,
Shakes from his dreary wings diſcordant ſtorms,
Chill ſleet, and clattering hail. ———

I have quoted theſe ſimilies to give the reader an idea of the beauties of a perform-

formance which deſerves great praiſe: Leonidas is much read, but I have ſeen very few critical remarks on it. Pemberton's obſervations on poetry is an ingenious work, but much the greateſt part of it is on the ſubject in general, not this poem in particular; and in many reſpects is rather a panegyric than a criticiſm. I have pointed out but a few of the beauties of Leonidas; the bounds of this eſſay will not permit me to be more minute, but every reader will be ſtruck with many which I have omitted.

Before I conclude this ſketch on epic poetry, I cannot but remark a great difference in two very eminent critics, concerning the machinery of heroic poems. It has been often urged, that all machinery, that is, the intervention of ſupernatural powers, are deſtructive of the effect which an epic

epic poem ought to have; while, on the other hand, it has as often been aſſerted, that the marvellous is the grand foundation for the ſublimeſt beauties in ſuch pieces.

Fictions that tranſgreſs the bounds of nature, ſeldom have a good effect: they may inflame the imagination for a moment, but will not be reliſhed by any perſon of a correct taſte. Let me add, that of whatever uſe fictions may be to a mean genius, an able writer has much finer materials of nature's production for elevating his ſubject, and making it intereſting *.

In another place, he ſays,—"Firſt, it gives an air of fiction to the whole; and prevents that impreſſion of rea-

* Elements of Criticiſm, vol. iii. p. 242.

lity

lity which is requiſite to intereſt our affections, and to move our paſſions *. This of itſelf is ſufficient to explode machinery, whatever entertainment it may give to readers of a fantaſtic taſte or irregular imagination. And next, were it poſſible to diſguiſe the fiction, and to delude us into a notion of reality, which I think can hardly be; an inſuperable objection would ſtill remain, which is, that the aim, or end of an epic poem, can never be accompliſhed in any perfection where machinery is introduced. Virtuous emotions cannot be raiſed ſucceſsfully, but by the actions of thoſe who are endued with paſſions and affections like our own, that is, by human actions. And as for moral inſtruction, it is evident, that we draw none from beings who act not upon the ſame principles with us."

* Elements of Criticiſm, vol. iii. p. 241.

Now

Now Mr. Hurd is of a very different opinion; he will never allow theſe *much finer materials*; but let him ſpeak for himſelf. "The Pagan gods, and Gothic fairies were equally out of credit when Milton wrote. He did well therefore to ſupply their room with angels and devils. If theſe too ſhould wear out of the popular creed (and they ſeem in a hopeful way from the liberty ſome late critics have taken with them) I know not what other expedients the epic poet might have recourſe to. But this I know, the pomp of verſe, the energy of deſcription, and even the fineſt moral paintings, would ſtand him in no ſtead. Without *admiration* (which cannot be effected but by the marvellous of celeſtial intervention, I mean the agency of ſuperior natures, really exiſting, or by the illuſion

luſion of the fancy taken to be ſo) no epic poem can be long-lived *."

Here we ſee two notions abſolutely contradictory to each other; but the ſame critics differ as much in their opinion of the Henriade. His lordſhip ſays, "In the ſixth canto of the Henriade, St. Lewis appears in perſon, and terrifies the ſoldiers." In the ſeventh canto, St. Lewis ſends the god of ſleep to Henry; and in the tenth, the Demons of diſcord, fanaticiſm, war, &c. aſſiſt Aumale in a ſingle combat with Turenne, and are chaſed away by a good angel brandiſhing the ſword of God. To blend ſuch fictitious perſonages in the ſame action with mortals, makes a bad figure at any rate, and is intolerable in a hiſtory ſo recent as that of Henry IV. This ſingly, is ſufficient to make the

* Letters on Chivalry and Romance, p. 102.

Hen-

Henriade a ſhort-lived poem, were it otherwiſe poſſeſſed of every beauty*."

Mr. Hurd's words are theſe. "I am not afraid," ſays he, immediately after the paſſage I juſt quoted, "to inſtance in the Henriade itſelf; which, notwithſtanding the compoſition, will, in a ſhort time, be no more read than the Gondibert of Sir W. Davenant, and for the ſame reaſon."

We here find Monſ. Voltaire's celebrated poem condemned to oblivion for the moſt oppoſite reaſons poſſible. In which opinion ſhould we place our credit? Certainly in that which agrees with the practice of Homer, Virgil, Milton, and all the greateſt poets, whoſe poems have been ſo long and univerſally admired:

* Elements of Crit. vol. iii. p. 244.

but

but I cannot think Lord Kaimes proves his aſſertion, even philoſophically: for whatever ſome rigid critics may have imagined, the end of poetry is pleaſure, not inſtruction; therefore we certainly ſhall be more likely to have our paſſions, our wonder, and particularly our attention, touched with the marvellous, than the moſt exact order and neatneſs which repreſent things only as they really happen, without daring to uſe thoſe ſublime fictions which ſtrike us with admiration.

Take from Homer his machinery, and you curtail his poems of half their beauties. For my part, I cannot but think his religious creed was of much greater ſervice to him, as a poet, than any chriſtian's can be to him. The adventures of Homer's gods, as much as we may ridicule them, are infinitely more poetic, and admit

admit of far greater variety of painting than angels or devils can yield. A few paſſages in Milton may be produced to contradict this aſſertion; but examine the Iliad and the Paradiſe Loſt, and it will appear that the compariſon will be greatly in favour of the former. But a ſtrong proof of it is, that excepting Satan (whoſe various character reſembles him to ſome of Homer's gods) the machinery of Milton in general is not comparable to that of the Grecian; in other words, the moſt poetic ſupernatural character in Milton the moſt reſembles thoſe of Homer. The tribe of inferior gods and goddeſſes in the Iliad, far exceeds the inferior angels and devils in the Paradiſe Loſt *. Monſ.

* I have often endeavoured to account for that ſuperiority, which is ſo viſible in the compoſitions of the antient poets: and have frequently aſſigned their

Monſ. Boileau was therefore certainly right, when he made that remark,

De la foi d'un Chretien les miſteres terribles
D'ornemens egayés ne ſont point ſuſceptibles ;
L'Evangile a l'eſprit n'offre de tous cotés,
Que penitence à faire, & tourmens merités.

Batteux's obſervation on theſe lines is injudicious. " Notwithſtanding, ſays he, the

their religion as in the number of thoſe cauſes which probably concurred to give them this remarkable pre-eminence. That enthuſiaſm which is ſo eſſential to every true artiſt in the poetical way, was conſiderably heightened and enflamed by the whole turn of their ſacred doctrines ; and the fancied preſence of their muſes had almoſt as wonderful an effect upon their thoughts and language, as if they had been really and divinely inſpired. Whilſt all nature was ſuppoſed to ſwarm with divinities, and every oak and fountain was believed to be the reſidence of ſome preſiding deity ; what wonder, if the poet was animated by

reſpect we have for the opinion of this great writer, we cannot but think, that, was another Homer to ariſe, he would find, in the hiſtory of our religion, ample matter to exerciſe his genius. It is true, he might not, indeed, repreſent a Jupiter thundering on Mount Ida: we might not ſee gods and goddeſſes mingle in a crowd of mortal combatants,

the imagined influence of ſuch exalted ſociety, and found himſelf tranſported beyond the ordinary hints of ſober humanity? The mind, when attended only by mere mortals of ſuperior powers, is obſerved to riſe in her ſtrength; and her faculties open and enlarge themſelves, when ſhe acts in the view of thoſe for whom ſhe has conceived a more than common reverence. But when the force of ſuperſtition moves in concert with the powers of imagination, and genius is inflamed by devotion, poetry muſt ſhine out in all her brighteſt perfection and ſplendor.

Sir T. Fitzoſborne's Letters, p. 297.

covered

covered over with duſt, and reciprocally attacking and overcoming each other. But with what energy, what maſterly force, would he paint the God who created the univerſe with a word; who ſees and comprehends every thing, and gives life and being to all! How delightful muſt it be to follow ſuch a poet, while, with a ſoul inflamed with thoſe ideas that filled the minds of the prophets and other ſacred writers, ideas produced by religion, he paints a hero, imagining, attempting, and executing the greateſt things; always under the immediate will and guidance of a celeſtial ſpirit, which gives him prudence to foreſee, fortitude to encounter, and courage and patience to ſurmount, the obſtacles in his way!" This is a trite remark, as falſe as it is ſpecious. Had the paganiſm of the antients been leſs proper for poetry than

the chriſtian faith, their notions would all have been dropt even by the poets: but the contrary is the caſe; for the gods of Homer, it has been often ſaid, are the gods of poetry to this day. Our religion cannot furniſh us with that variety of ſupernatural beings: In the poetry of the antients every quality, almoſt of the mind or body, was deified; and how much better figure will Venus make in a poem, than a plain deſcription of the effects of beauty: their theology threw a vaſt variety of action and paſſion into all their poems; whereas ours, a very few ſubjects excepted, muſt abound in deſcription and narration. There is hardly a greater enlivener of poetry than perſonification; nothing hardly could make a figure in the poems of the antients, but what was either deified or cloſely connected with many ſupernatural beings:

ings: this gave a ſpirit and variety to their poetry, which ours muſt want, unleſs we adopt their poetic creed. We need only turn to Homer, and we ſhall immediately perceive, that a vaſt number of the fineſt ſtrokes in his poems would have been inevitably loſt, had he compoſed in the time of Milton, and merely on the account I am ſpeaking of. Milton carried the machinery of modern theology to its perfection, and the utmoſt efforts of his imagination could not render it, on the whole, equal to that of the Grecian. The Deity is not a proper perſonage for an actor in an epic poem; but Satan, who moſt reſembles ſome of the gods in Homer, from the mixture in his character, is the only ſupport of the machinery of the Paradiſe Loſt *.

* Trublet's aſſertion has no reaſon to ſupport it. Prejudice cannot take from us the total uſe of our ſenſes.——

On a dit que tel eſt le charme des fables Greeques, que déſabuſés d'elles par la raiſon & la religion, nous y tenons encore par l'imagination ; elles nous paroiſſent abſurdes, & pourtant agréables. Je réponds que c'eſt moins l'effet d'un agrément qui leur ſoit propre, que des préjugés & des impreſſions du college. Ces fables nous plaiſent comme les lieux que nous avons habités & frequentés dans notre premiere jeuneſſe, comme notre patrie. Les femmes, & les hommes d'eſprit qui n'ont point étudié, & qui n'entendent parler de ces fables que dans un age raiſonnable, les trouvent auſſi inſipides que ridicules.

Eſſais ſur divers ſujets de litterature, &c. tome iv. p. 189.

That admirable critic Mr. Webb, in his uſual elegant manner, diſplays the vaſt advantage of the antients over the moderns in painting, and from the ſame cauſe: "The antients had not only their profane hiſtory, rich in the moſt glorious and intereſting events; but their ſacred, whilſt it furniſhed them with new ideas of the ſublime, gave no check to the pathetic. Their gods, ſuperior in grace, majeſty, and beauty, were yet ſubject to all the feelings and paſſions of humanity. How unequal

equal is the lot of the modern artiſts? Employed by prieſts, or princes who thought like prieſts, their ſubjects are, for the moſt part, taken from a religion, which profeſſes to baniſh or ſubdue the paſſions: their characters are borrowed from the loweſt ſpheres of life; men, in whom meanneſs of birth, and ſimplicity of manners, were the beſt titles to their election. Even their divine Maſter is no where, in painting, attended with a great idea; his long ſtrait hair, Jewiſh beard, and poor apparel, would undignify the moſt exalted nature; humility and reſignation, his characteriſtics, are qualities extremely edifying, but by no means pictureſque. Let us, for example, compare (I muſt be underſtood to mean only as ſubjects for painting) a Chriſt armed with a ſcourge, driving the money-changers out of the Temple, to an Alexander, the thunder in his hand, ready to dart it on the rebellious nations. It is not in the ſublime alone that their ſubjects are deficient, they are equally ſo in the pathetic: the ſufferings, which they moſtly repreſent, are in obedience to prophecies and the will of heaven; they are often the choice of the ſufferers, and a tenfold premium is at hand. When St. Andrew falls down to worſhip the croſs, on which

he is ſoon after to be nailed, we may be improved by ſuch an example of piety and zeal; but we cannot feel for one who is not concerned for himſelf. We are not ſo calm at the ſacrifice of Iphigenia; beautiful, innocent, and unhappy; we look upon her as the victim of an unjuſt decree; ſhe might live the object of univerſal love; ſhe dies the object of univerſal pity. This defect in the ſubject, and of habitude in the painters, accounts for the coldneſs, with which we look in general on their works in the galleries and churches: the genius of painting, waſting its powers on crucifixions, holy families, laſt ſuppers, and the like, wants nerves, if at any time the ſubject calls for the pathetic or ſublime."

Inquiry into the Beauties of Painting, p. 145.

SECT.

SECT. III.

Of LYRIC POETRY.

THE longeſt ſtring of critical precepts will never give us ſo clear and competent an idea of the real beauties of lyric poetry, as reading ſome of the beſt odes of Pindar and the Alexander's feaſt of Dryden. The peculiar characteriſtic of the ode is enthuſiaſm; which is much eaſier imagined than defined. It is this quality in a poet that makes his genius glow with ardor, fires his imagination, and animates all the faculties of his ſoul. It is this warmth of enthuſiaſm that hurries him into thoſe impetuous tranſports of fancy, which ſoar beyond the bounds of order, and produce that beautiful confuſion which, to uſe an expreſſion of the abbé Fraguier,

" infinitely

" infinitely tranſcends the regularity of the moſt ſtudious art." Here we meet with the higheſt flights of grandeur, and the moſt ſhining ſtrokes of wit; and there, the tendereſt, and moſt beautiful images. Deſcriptions rich, happy, and ſublime, and then ſimple but exquiſitely moving; noble and harmonious expreſſions; lively and ſtriking metaphors, all ſpontaneouſly riſe up to captivate the imagination of the reader. The effect of poetry, which is the reſult of this poetic rapture, this divine enthuſiaſm of the mind, exceeds even that of the moſt exquiſite muſic. A man of taſte can neither read, nor hear it, without feeling ſome of that fire that produced it.

Pindar, the prince of the lyric poets, poſſeſſed of the moſt unbridled and irregular

gular fancy in the world, is vaſt in his deſigns, boundleſs in his imagination, and great in his expreſſions. His thoughts are ſublime, but his vivacity too often overpowers his judgment; he ſometimes ſinks by attempting to ſoar beyond the bounds of his genius. As to his irregularity, it is one part of the character of the ode, the nature of which requires that tranſport which I juſt deſcribed. The harmony of the numbers, and the grandeur of the diction in Pindar, is inimitable. In his numbers we are ſometimes above the clouds, ſometimes deſcending, ſometimes ſwimming in a direct courſe, riſing by little and little, ſinking as gradually, carried aloft as quick as lightning by ſuch rapidity of meaſures as agitates the ſoul, and makes the paſſions keep time with the numbers. Pindar and Sophocles, ſays Longinus, like a rapid fire,

fire, carry every thing before them, though sometimes the heat is unhappily extinguished *.

Anacreon, the next Greek lyric writer, is celebrated for his graceful, easy, and delicate air; but his flights are not so high as those of Pindar. Horace has in some of his odes joined great part of Pindar's force to the sweetness of Anacreon. The ingenious author of the Essay on the writings and genius of Pope, has made a very sensible observation on the writings of Horace.—" It seems also to be another common mistake, that one of Horace's characteristics is the sublime: of which indeed he has given a very few

* Ὁ δὲ Πινδαρος καὶ ὁ Σοφοκλῆς ὅστε μὲν οἷον παιτὰ ἐπιφλέγουσι τῇ φορᾷ, σβεσθέντα δ' ἀλογως πολλακις, καὶ πίπτουσιν ἀτυχέστατα. Longin. cap. 33.

strokes,

ſtrokes, and thoſe taken from Pindar, and probably from Alcæus. His excellency lay in exquiſite obſervations on human life, and in touching the foibles of mankind with delicacy and urbanity. It is eaſy to perceive this moral turn in all his compoſitions: the writer of the epiſtles is diſcerned in the odes. Elegance, not ſublimity, was his grand characteriſtic. Horace is the moſt popular author of antiquity; the reaſon is, becauſe he abounds in images drawn from familiar life, and in remarks, that "come home to men's buſineſs and boſoms." Hence he is more frequently quoted and alluded to than any poet of a higher caſt *."

Mr. Dryden's muſic-ode is the beſt modern lyric compoſition, and is much

* Eſſay on the Writings and Genius of Pope, p. 172.

ſuperior

ſuperior to many in Pindar. Indeed the pomp and richneſs of the expreſſion, the harmony of the numbers, and the ſublimity of ſome of the flights, are almoſt unparalleled. This ſingle ode would have immortalized the name of Dryden, had he been the author of nothing beſides. There is ſomething extremely beautiful in the repetition of the word *happy*, and the ſentence *None but the brave* in the following paſſage,

Happy, happy, happy pair!
None but the brave, none but the brave,
None but the brave deſerves the fair.

And again, what can be more moving than that of *fall'n*,

He ſung Darius great and good,
By too ſevere a fate
Fall'n, fall'n, fall'n, fall'n,
Fall'n from his high eſtate,
And welt'ring in his blood.

I could

I could produce ſeveral inſtances of theſe peculiar beauties in this ode *, the whole of which is indeed one continued ſcene of grandeur and ſweetneſs. The inferiority of Mr. Pope's ode on the ſame ſubject is too well known to need any proof. It is indeed amazing to think of that poet's attempting it after ſo exquiſite a one as Dryden had compoſed on the ſame ſubject. Mr. Gray's ode on muſic contains ſome very fine lines, which breathe the true ſpirit of poetry. The concluſion of the firſt part of the third ſtanza is very expreſſive:

Thine too theſe golden keys, immortal boy!
This can unlock the gates of joy;
Of horror that, and thrilling fears,
Or ope the ſacred ſource of ſympathetic tears †.

* Particularly the ſtanza beginning—*Revenge! revenge!*

† Odes by Mr. Gray, p. 10.

I have

I have before obſerved, that an impetuous enthuſiaſm was the characteriſtic of Pindar, and lyric compoſitions. I know not any ode that comes ſo near to his ſupreme excellency as that of Dryden, in which we are hurried on by a moſt noble poetic fire. But the concluſion of Mr. Gray's muſic-ode can boaſt of great beauties, though of a different kind.

Hark, his hands the lyre explore!
Bright-eyed fancy hovering o'er,
Scatters from her pictur'd urn
Thoughts that breathe, and words that burn.
But, ah! 'tis heard no more. ——
Oh! lyre divine, what daring ſpirit
Wakes thee now? Tho' he inherit
Nor the pride nor ample pinion
That the Theban eagle bear,
Sailing with ſupreme dominion,
Thro' the azure deep of air:
Yet oft before his infant eyes would run
Such forms as glitter in the Muſe's ray
With orient lines, unborrow'd of the ſun:

Yet ſhall he mount and keep his diſtant way
Beyond the limits of a vulgar fate,
Beneath the good how far—but far above the great.

The idea of bright-eyed Fancy ſcattering thoughts and words from her pictured urn, is extremely happy, and as happily expreſſed. The other paſſages which are diſtinguiſhed by Italics are alſo very beautiful. In this whole ſtanza the thoughts are juſt, the numbers harmonious, and the true ſpirit of lyric poetry breathes throughout it. But the beſt ode which this ingenious gentleman has publiſhed, is that on the tradition of Edward the Third's putting the Welch bards to death; which is truly a moſt excellent piece of poetry, and has many ſtrokes that indicate an exuberant imagination, and contains much of that fire which is the very ſoul of poetry.

Mr. Maſon's lyric pieces are well known. If they do not riſe to that fine enthuſiaſm which we ſo much admire in Dryden, they never fail to pleaſe. That on the fate of tyranny is the beſt, and, if I may venture my opinion, that on independency the worſt; though there are ſome paſſages in it that are really poetic, as in the third ſtanza.

Thou heard'ſt him, goddeſs, ſtrike the tender ſtring,
And badſt his ſoul with bolder paſſions move:
Strait theſe reſponſive ſhores forgot to ring,
With beauty's praiſe, or plaint of ſlighted love;
To loftier flights his daring genius roſe,
And led the war 'gainſt thine and freedom's foes*.

Theſe lines are wrote with ſpirit; but the two harſh words *heard'ſt* and *badſt* are far from adding to their beauty. Mr. Maſon ſeems rather to aim at a ſteady

* Odes by Mr. Maſon, p. 10.

and

and flowing diction than a ſublime and pompous one. Horace, not Pindar, appears to have been his model. The following lines, though not animated with poetic enthuſiaſm, are beautifully deſcriptive.

Can muſic's voice, can beauty's eye,
Can painting's glowing hand ſupply
A charm ſo ſuited to my mind,
As blows this hollow guſt of wind,
As drops this little weeping rill
Soft tinkling down the moſs-grown hill,
While thro' the weſt, where ſinks the crimſon day,
Meek twilight ſlowly ſails, and waves her banners grey?

It would be unpardonable here to omit Dr. Akenſide's ode to lord Huntingdon, which is compoſed in a fine ſpirit of lyric poetry; there is an expreſſive majeſty in his numbers, that appears with

advantage and propriety in this ſpecies of poetry, and it contains ſome ſublime ſtrokes. The ſecond ſtanza begins very noble:

Mark, how the dread Pantheon ſtands,
Amid the domes of modern hands:
Amid the toys of idle ſtate,
How ſimply, how ſeverely great!

The third part of the ſame ſtanza is alſo very great. I cannot but admire the fine ſpirit of liberty which breathes throughout the whole ode. After comparing the happy conſtitution of our country with the ſlavery of others, he goes on,

Here let the bard whoſe daſtard tongue
Leaves public arguments unſung,
Bid public praiſe farewel:
Let him to fitter climes remove,
Far from the hero's and the patriot's love,
And lull myſterious monks to ſlumber in their cell.

The

The whole fifth ſtanza is addreſſed in the ſame noble ſtrain to liberty. Speaking of Scarſdale's cliffs, the ſeat of it, where Candiſh, Booth, and Oſborn ſate, he breaks into a fine poetic ſtrain in their praiſe:

When burſting from their country's chain,
Even in the midſt of deadly harms,
Of papal ſnares and lawleſs arms,
They plann'd for freedom this her awful reign.

In the ſixth ſtanza, he glances at the rebellion in very noble lines and equal ſpirit; and the ode concludes with a fine warmth of poetic rapture.

——— Eternal God alone
For mortals fixeth that ſublime award.
He from the faithful records of his throne,
Bids the hiſtorian and the bard
Diſpoſe of honour and of ſcorn;
Diſcern the patriot from the ſlave;
And writes the good, the wiſe, the brave,
For leſſons to the multitude unborn.

To point out all the beauties of this ode, which does honour to the preſent age, would be too long a taſk, as a perfect knowledge of its excellence can only be acquired by reading the whole; yet in ſuch critical eſſays as this, it is of advantage to ſome readers to have the moſt ſtriking ones diſplayed.—Mr. Warton's ode to Fancy has great merit; it is certainly a fine piece of poetic enthuſiaſm, and expreſſive imagery. It opens with an addreſs to Fancy, and deſcribes its rural ſeats,

> Where Nature ſeems to ſit alone
> Majeſtic on a craggy throne.

His tranſitions are peculiarly beautiful; from groves of woodbines, and green and graſſy dales, Fancy leads him to the yellow mead, the ſeat of joy and white-robed Peace, of the feſtive court of Venus

Venus, of mirth and youth: then ſuddenly he breaks out in a moſt poetic ſtrain;

Yet not theſe flowery fields of joy,
Can long my penſive mind employ,
Haſte Fancy from the ſcenes of folly
To meet the matron Melancholy.

This ſubject occaſions a very beautiful piece of pictureſque imagery.

Or to ſome abby's mould'ring tow'rs,
Where to avoid cold wintry ſhow'rs,
The naked beggar ſhivering lies,
While whiſtling tempeſts round her riſe,
And trembles leſt the tottering wall
Should on her ſleeping infants fall.

The ſubject again changes to martial fire and the clangors of the trumpet; which are deſcribed very finely; he ſuddenly aſks what ſpirit hurries him away? —And goes on,

'Tis

'Tis Fancy in her fiery car
Tranſports me to the thickeſt war,
There whirls me o'er the hills of ſlain,
Where tumult and deſtruction reign;
Where mad with pain the wounded ſteed,
Tramples the dying and the dead:
Where giant Terror ſtalks around,
With ſullen joy ſurveys the ground,
And pointing to th' enſanguin'd field
Shakes his dreadful gorgon ſhield!

I hardly any where know a more ſublime piece of imagery than this of Terror ſtalking over the field of battle; the thought is extremely happy, and cloathed in very poetic language. From the horrid deſtruction of war he changes to the ſoft delicacy of love; he invokes Fancy to guide him to his Laura, and goes on,

The pangs of abſence O! remove,
For thou can'ſt place me near my love,

Can'ſt

Can'ſt fold in viſionary bliſs,
And let me think I ſteal a kiſs.

He ſoon afterwards calls on the imaginary goddeſs to leave the tomb of her darling Shakeſpear, and inſpire ſome future bard, who, by boldly ſmiting the ſounding lyre, may

O'er all our liſt'ning paſſions reign,
O'erwhelm our ſouls with joy and pain,
With terror ſhake, with pity move,
Rouze with revenge, or melt with love.

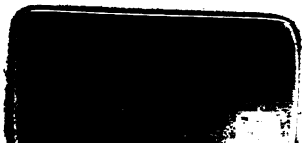
Theſe lines are fine, and ſo is the whole poem; the language is well adapted to the ſubject, the ſentiments natural, and the imagery pictureſque and expreſſive.

Mr. Whitehead's ode to the Tiber contains ſome ſtrokes that deſerve to be mentioned. In the firſt ſtanza he addreſſes

dreſſes that celebrated river, ſpeaks of Echo's reſounding with tranſport from her banks the ſtrains of her former poets, —and ſuddenly breaks out,

Thy banks?—Alas! is this the boaſted ſcene,
This dreary, wide, uncultivated plain,
Where ſick'ning nature wears a fainter green,
And deſolation ſpreads her torpid reign?
Is this the ſcene where freedom breath'd,
Her copious horn where plenty wreath'd,
And health at opening day
Bade all her roſeate breezes fly
To wake the ſons of induſtry,
And make their fields more gay?

Theſe lines are pretty; the concluſion of the third ſtanza is alſo very poetic; and the whole ode in general has merit.

End of VOLUME the FIRST.

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